TWENTY YEARS EXPERIENCES AS A GHOST HUNTER

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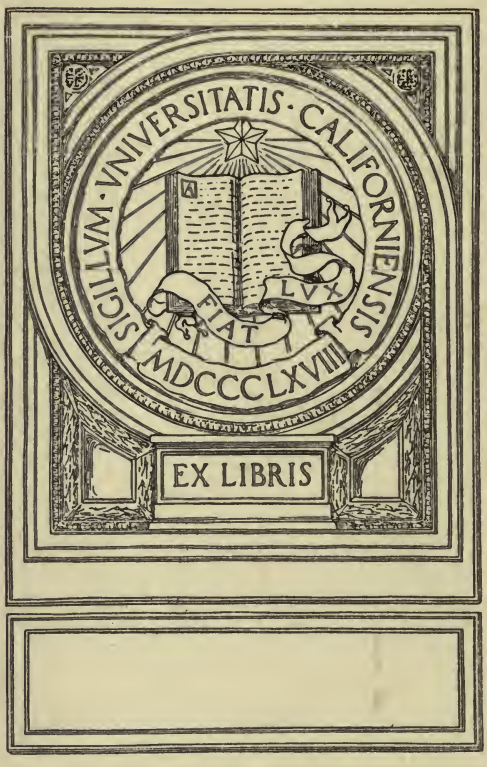
B. J. O'DONNELL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TWENTY YEARS' EXPERIENCE AS A GHOST HUNTER

Twenty Years' Experience as a Ghost Hunter

BY

ELLIOT O'DONNELL

AUTHOR OF "THE SORCERY CLUB," "WERWOLVES,"
"SOME HAUNTED HOUSES OF ENGLAND AND WALES,"
"HAUNTED HIGHWAYS," ETC., ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

In presenting this volume of ghostly reminiscences to the Public I would lay stress on the fact that, in order to avoid the danger of incurring an action for slander or libel, I have—save where expressedly stated to the contrary—resorted to the use of fictitious names for all persons and houses. For the reproduction of one or two articles I am indebted to the courtesy of Mr. Ralph Shirley.

ELLIOT O'DONNELL.

1916.

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UNIV. OF CALIFORNIA

Twenty Years' Experience as a Ghost Hunter

CHAPTER I

I COMMENCE MY GHOSTLY INVESTIGATIONS IN DUBLIN

In starting a book of this sort, I believe it is usual to say something about one's self.

I was born in the 'seventies. My father came from County Limerick, and belonged to the Truagh Castle O'Donnells, who, tracing their descent from Shane Luirg, the elder brother of Niall Garbh, the ancester of Red Hugh, rightly claim to be the oldest branch of the great clan. He graduated at Trinity College, Dublin, was for some time vicar of a parish near Worcester, and died in Egypt, under mysterious and much discussed circumstances,* soon after I came into the world.

My mother was English; she belonged to an old Midland family, and only survived my father a few years.

Although I am generally known as a ghost hunter, needless to say it was not for such a career that I was educated, first of all at Clifton College, then at an Army crammer's, and finally at Chedwode Crawley's well-known coaching establishment in Ely Place, Dublin. There I read for the Royal Irish Constabulary, and, attending regularly, remained for a little over two

*See "The Oriental Zig-zag," by C. Hamilton.

years. I can safely say these two years were two of the happiest I have ever known, for my companions at that time were the nicest set of fellows I have ever met, and amongst them I formed many lifelong friendships.

When I was not working, I usually spent my time playing football or cricket, to both of which sports I was devoted, and, when I was not thus engaged, I used to tramp across hill and dale continually exploring the country in search of adventure.

But in those days I did not look for ghosts—they came to me ; they came to me then, as they had come to me before, and as they have come to me ever since.

With my early experiences of the Unknown—which experiences, by the way, extend over the whole period of my youth—I have dealt fully in former works ; so that in this volume I propose to confine myself to later experiences, commencing approximately with my début as an investigator of haunted houses and superphysical occurrences in general

To begin with, however, let me state plainly that I lay no claims to being what is termed a scientific psychical researcher. I am not a member of any august society that conducts its investigations of the other world, or worlds, with test tube and weighing apparatus ; neither do I pretend to be a medium or consistent clairvoyant.

I am merely a ghost hunter ; merely one who honestly believes that he inherits in some degree the faculty of psychic perceptiveness from a long line of Celtic ancestry ; and who is, and always has been, deeply and genuinely interested in all questions relative to phantasms and a continuance of individual life after physical dissolution. Moreover, in addition to this psychic faculty, I possess, as I have already hinted, a spirit of adventure ; and since this spirit is irresistible, had I not decided to become a ghost hunter, I should doubtless have embarked upon some other and hardly less exciting pursuit.

The actual cause of my decision to adopt ghost-hunting as a profession was an experience which befel me in the summer of '92. I was at that time a student in Ely Place, Dublin, and being in search of rooms, was recommended to try a house within a stone's throw of the Waterloo Road.

A widow named Davis, with two leviathan daughters, Mona and Bridget, ran the establishment, and as the vacant apartments were large, apparently well ventilated and exceedingly moderate in price, I decided to take them. Consequently, I arrived there with my luggage one afternoon, and was speedily engaged in the tiring and somewhat irritating task of unpacking.

When I retired to rest that first night, I certainly had no thought of ghosts or anything in connection with them; on the contrary, my mind was wholly occupied with speculations as to how I should fare in the coming weekly examination at Crawley's, whether the extra attention I had recently bestowed on mathematics would be of any service to me, or whether, in spite of it, I should again occupy my place at the bottom of the class. I remember thinking, however, as I blew out the light and turned into bed, that there was something about the room now—though I could not tell what—that I had not noticed by daylight; but I soon went to sleep, and although I awoke several times before morning—a phenomenon in itself—I cannot say that I thought then of any superphysical element in the atmosphere. It was not until I had been there several nights that the event occurred which effectually shaped my future career.

One evening the two girls, Mona and Bridget, were making so much racket in the room beneath me, that I found work impossible, and being somewhat tired, for I had stuck very close to it all day, I resolved to go to bed. On my way thither I encountered two young men, T.C. students, who were also lodging in the house, hotly engaged in an argument; and they appealed to me to

express an opinion. I told them what I thought, as they followed me upstairs; then, when I reached my room, I abruptly bade them good-night, and, entering, locked the door behind me.

Sitting down on the edge of the bed, I quietly slipped off my clothes and put out the light. The two men were still haranguing one another for all they were worth when I got in between the sheets and prepared to lie down. The room was not entirely dark; from between the folds of the thick plush curtains that enveloped the windows stray beams from the powerful moonlight filtered through and battled their way to the foot of the bed. I was looking at them with some degree of curiosity, when I saw something move. I glanced at it in astonishment, and, to my unmitigated horror, the shape of something dark and sinister rose noiselessly from the floor and came swiftly towards me. I tried to shout, but could not make a sound. I was completely paralysed, and as I sat there, sick with fear and apprehension, the thing leaped on to me, and, gripping me mercilessly by the throat, bore me backwards

I gasped, and choked, and suffered the most excruciating pain. But there was no relaxation—the pressure of those bony fingers only tightened and the torture went on At last, after what seemed to me an eternity, there was a loud buzzing in my ears, my head seemed to spin round violently, and my brain to burst. I lost consciousness. On coming to, I found that my assailant had left me. I struck a light. My fellow-lodgers were still going at one another hammer and tongs—and the door was, as I had left it, locked on the inside. I searched the room thoroughly; the window was bolted; there was nothing in the cupboard; nothing under the bed; nothing anywhere. I got into bed again, full of the worst anticipations, and, if sleep came to me, it was only in the briefest snatches.

At dawn the room became suffused with a cold, grey glow, and the suggestion of something horribly evil standing close beside the bed and sardonically watching

me impressed me so strongly that, yielding to a sudden impulse of terror, I hid my head under the bed-clothes, and remained in that undignified position till the morning was well advanced and I was "called."

I got up, feeling downright ill, and although the sunlight metamorphosing everything now made the mere thought of a ghost simply ludicrous, I hurried out of the room as speedily as possible. Nor did I venture to pass another night there.

My landlady did not demur when I asked her to transfer me to another apartment, and later, before I took my final departure from her house, she confessed to me that it was haunted. She believed that it had been used as a private home for mentally afflicted people, and that someone, either one of the patients or a nurse—she did not know which—had died, under extremely painful circumstances, in the room I had first occupied.

The Davises left the house soon after I did, and who lives there now, and whether the hauntings still continue, I cannot say. When I last made enquiries, about two years ago, I learned that the then occupants had never admitted experiencing anything unusual, but that they always kept the room in which I had undergone the sensations of strangulation carefully locked.

This adventure of mine, intensely unpleasant as it had been at the time, profoundly interested me. Hitherto I had placidly accepted as truth all the dogmas of religion hurled at me from the pulpit and drilled into me at school, for the simple reason that I had always been taught to regard as infinitely correct and absolutely above criticism all that the clergy told me: God made the world, they said, and all the laws and principles appertaining to it—that was sufficient—I need not ask any questions. When I looked about me and saw men, and women, dogs, horses, and other animals suffering indescribable agonies from all kinds of foul and malignant diseases; when I encountered cripples, the maimed and blind, idiots and lunatics; or read in the papers of

swindles, murders and suicides ; or noted how, throughout nature, the strong animals prey upon the weak ; how, for example, the tiger, the lion and the leopard terrorize the jungle, just as the shark and octopus terrorize the sea, and the wasp and spider, centipede and scorpion terrorize insect life (being furnished respectively with weapons for tearing and rending, and sucking the flesh, and entailing the most excruciating tortures on the nerve centres) ; when, I say, I noted all this, I was given to understand that I must on no account comment upon it—to do so was impious and wicked—I must abide by the precept of my pastor and pedagogue, namely, that " God is almighty and merciful, loving and wise."

But now it was different—I was no longer in the schoolroom, no longer under the immediate influence of the Church. I met people in Dublin imbued with the broader instincts of a big, cosmopolitan community ; I listened to their reasoning—reasoning which at first immeasurably shocked me, and afterwards struck me as horribly sane. Then, at this crisis, came the incident of the strangling. I tried to attribute it to a dream, but I was prevented by the fact that I had only just got into bed, and had not even lain down, when the figure seized me. Hence, I could only conclude that some spirit—the nature of my suffering and the horror it inspired leading me to suppose that it was a particularly evil one—had been my aggressor.

But why was it not in Hell ? Had it escaped in spite of the strict supervision of the Almighty ? Or could it be possible that the orthodox Paradise and Purgatory did not exist, and that the spirits of the dead were allowed to wander about at ill ? I became interested—deeply so ; all sorts of wild speculations floated through my mind ; I resolved to enquire further.

I would not be guided by any creed ; I would set out on my work of investigation wholly unbiassed ; I would gain whatever knowledge there was to be gained of

another world without the aid either of priest or occultist, medium or scientist.

Several of my friends in Dublin were greatly interested in ghosts, and I learned from them of two houses that had long borne the reputation of being haunted. One was close to St. Stephen's Green, within sight of the Queen's Service Academy, and the other, a big, ugly edifice of a dingy grey, was in Blackrock. I had stayed in the former when a child, and had vivid recollections of the holes in the stone stairs, through which boiling oil was poured on the heads of the English soldiers at the time of the '98.

There were many large and stately rooms in the house, oak-panelled and beautified throughout with much carving. I remember looking with awe and perplexity at the number of odd shadows that used to put in an appearance on the stairs and in the passages, just when it was my bed-time, but I did not then attribute them to ghosts. I simply did not know what they were. I heard sounds, too—clangs and clashes, and footsteps tramping up and down the stairs; sounds I did not attempt to analyse, possibly because I dared not. That was in 1886; I was then a small boy, and now—now only—after I had long left the house, and was back in Dublin, with the experience of the strangling ghost still fresh in my mind, I began to wonder whether these strange sounds and shadows might not have been due to the presence of the Superphysical. I mentioned the matter to my friends, and they expressed astonishment that I had not heard the house was haunted. One of them, a lady, told me that she had once stayed there and had been awakened every night by the sounds I had described—the sounds of heavy footsteps rushing up the stairs, of cries and groans, shrieks and oaths, coupled with the clashing of scabbards and sword blades, and the sound as of falling bodies

Yet nothing was ever to be seen, saving the moonlight and shadows—plenty of shadows—shadows strangely suggestive of grotesque and fancifully clad people I

tried to obtain permission to sleep in the house, and in my innocence of the ways of landlords, I stated with the most pathetic candour my true intention—I wanted to investigate. The reply I got was certainly not courteous, neither did it permit of argument. Hence, feeling considerably crestfallen and humiliated, I found myself forced to give up my first attempt at ghost-hunting.

Then I turned my attention to the house in Blackrock, and fared no better. The landlord had been bothered to death with requests to spend nights there, and was endeavouring to discover the originator of the report that the place was haunted, in order that he might bring an action for Slander of Title. Consequently I could only examine the house from the outside, hoping that its ghostly inhabitants would one night take pity on me and exhibit themselves at one of the windows. But in this, too, I was disappointed; although, as the place invariably inspired me with the greatest dread, I have no doubt whatever but that it was genuinely and badly haunted.

There were several stories in circulation in Dublin about that time concerning the nature of the haunting, and the following—one of the most reliable—was told me by a Mrs. Blake. I will give it as nearly as I can in her own words :

" When I was a child of about twelve," she began, " which was a good many years ago, my father, who was then stationed in Dublin, took the house on a three years' lease, at a very low rental, due, so the owner stated, to the fact that there were far too many stairs, a feature to which most people, on account of their servants, strongly objected. Nothing was said about ghosts, and nothing was further from my parents' minds when they took possession. We moved in towards the end of July, but it was not until the middle of September that we first became aware that the house was haunted. It happened in this way : My father and the maids were out one evening, and only my mother, my small brother and I were in the house. It was about eight o'clock. I

was upstairs in the nursery reading to Teddy, and my mother was in the drawing-room, two storeys beneath. I was just in the middle of a sentence, when Teddy interrupted me. 'Did you hear that?' he exclaimed; 'it's someone on the stairs. I believe they are listening.' I paused, and heard a loud creak. 'Who can it be?' I said; 'there's only mother in the house!' Much mystified, I closed the book and went out on to the landing. No one was there; but when I got to the head of the stairs, I heard a loud scream, and then a dull thud, just as if someone had fallen. In an agony of mind I ran downstairs to see what had happened. As I arrived in the hall, the door of the drawing-room was slowly opened, and I saw, peeping cautiously out, a white face with two dark, gleaming, obliquely-set eyes, that filled with an expression of the most diabolical hatred as they met mine. I was so terrified that I started back some paces, and, as I did so, the door opened a little wider, and the figure of a short, elderly woman, clad in an old-fashioned black dress, and white cap crumpled closely round her lean, haggard face, glided out, and, passing by, ascended the stairs. As she came to the first bend, she turned, and looking down at me with an evil leer, shook her hand menacingly at me. She then passed out of sight, and I heard her climb the stairs, step by step, till she came to the nursery landing. A moment later, and Teddy gave a violent shriek.

"My terror was now so great that I think I should have gone mad had I been left there any longer by myself; but, by a merciful providence, a key turned in the lock of the front door, and my father entered. The sight of his well-known figure on the threshold at once loosened the spell that had bound me, and with a cry of delight I clutched him by the arms, imploring him to see at once what had happened to mother and Teddy.

"He ran into the drawing-room first and found my mother on the floor, just reviving from a faint. Lighting the gas, he fetched her some brandy, and then, bidding

me stay with her, he hastened upstairs to Teddy. The latter was very badly frightened, and it was some days before he was well enough to give anything like a coherent account of what had happened. Of course, mother and father told Teddy that the queer figure they had seen was some friend of the servants, who had called while they were out, but I suppose they deemed me old enough to know the truth, for they discussed the incident openly in my presence. It appears that my mother had been quietly knitting in the drawing-room, when she suddenly felt very cold, and rising from her chair, with the intention of closing the door, found herself confronted by a hideous form. Subsequently, my father made a thorough search of the house, but he found no one, and as all the windows were fastened and the doors locked on the inside, we could only come to the conclusion that the figure my mother and Teddy and I had all seen was a ghost. A few days later it appeared to my father. He was coming out of his bedroom, when he saw a woman steal stealthily out of a room on the same landing and creep downstairs in front of him. There was something about her so intensely sinister that he felt chilled ; but, determining to find out who she was, he followed her, and catching her up, demanded her name. There was a chuckling answer, the figure instantly disappeared, and a number of invisible somethings clattered down the stairs past him.

" I think my father was very scared; at all events he came into the breakfast-room with a very white face and ate hardly anything. Some time after this, when the autumn was well advanced, my uncle came to stay with us. He was a jolly, rollicking sailor, who had fought the Turks at Navarino, and had had many exciting adventures with Chinese pirates.

" No one told him the house was haunted ; it was decided he should find that out for himself. One afternoon, several days after his arrival, he was taking off his boots in a room in the basement, when a current of icy air blew in on him, and, on raising his eyes to see whence

the draught came, he perceived an extraordinarily pretty girl, clad in a dark green riding-habit, such as he believed were worn in the days of his great grand-parents, standing in the doorway, watching him intently. 'This is one of Jack's surprises' (Jack was my father), he said to himself, 'and a deuced pleasant one, too! The rogue, he knows nothing pleases me so much as the sight of a pretty girl, and, by Jove, she is pretty!' Springing to his feet—for my uncle was never bashful in the presence of the fair sex—he advanced to shake hands. To his chagrin, however, she promptly turned round, and, walking swiftly away, began to ascend the stairs. My uncle followed her. On and on she led him till she came to the drawing-room; there she paused, and with the forefinger of her left hand on her lips, glanced coyly round at him. She then quietly turned the door handle, and signalling to him to follow, stole into the room on tiptoe. Charmed with this piece of acting, the naïvety of it appealing very strongly to his susceptible nature, my uncle hastened after her. The moment he crossed the threshold, however, he recoiled. Standing in the middle of the room was an old woman with a hideous, white face and black, leering eyes. There were no signs anywhere of the young and beautiful lady. She had completely vanished. My uncle was so shocked by the spectacle before him that he retreated on to the landing, and, as he did so, the drawing-room door swung to with a loud crash. He called my father, and they entered the room together; but it was quite empty, the old hag had disappeared as inexplicably as the girl. That evening there was to be a party, and the table in the dining-room groaned beneath the weight of one of those inimitable 'spreads,' in vogue some fifty or sixty years ago. With somewhat pardonable pride my mother took us all—my father, uncle and myself—to have a peep at it, before the guests arrived. As we drew near the room, we heard, to our astonishment, the plaintive sound of a spinet. My mother instantly drew back, trembling, whereupon my

uncle, forcing a laugh, said, ' This is one of the occasions upon which a gentleman should go first.' He threw open the door as he spoke, and we all peered in. What I saw will never be effaced from my memory. The room exhibited a complete wreckage—the cloth was half off the table, the massive silver candlesticks were overturned, and the floor was strewn with piles of broken glass, china and eatables—everything was smashed and ruined. In the midst of the debris, her face turned towards us, lay a very beautiful girl. There were unmistakable evidences of a ghastly wound, but her eyes were partly open, and the strange light which gleamed from their blue depths revealed an expression which could only have been hatched in hell—a hell, peopled not with passive torture-torn sufferers, but with wholly abandoned beings actively engaged in licentiousness and everything that is destructive and antagonistic to man's moral and mental progress. Standing over the woman, and holding a kind of stiletto in his hand, was a tall, fair man, in whose agonised and remorseful features we recognised at once a most startling likeness to my uncle. No detail was wanting—there was the deep scar on the temple, the curiously deep dimple in the chin ; indeed, saving for the old-fashioned clothes, no likeness could have been more exact. Standing by his side, her hideous, scowling face thrust forward, her evil eyes glaring at us with the same vindictive insolence, was the old woman I had seen that night in the hall. Then, my father, uttering some exclamation, crossed himself, and, as he did so, the figures abruptly vanished, whilst the whole house echoed and re-echoed with loud peals of mocking, diabolical laughter. That was the finale; we left immediately afterwards, and from that day to this the house, I believe, has stood almost uninterruptedly empty."

This is the gist of Mrs. Blake's account of the happenings, and as I never found her anything but strictly truthful, I believe them to have been given me without any conscious exaggeration.

CHAPTER II

I AM PURSUED BY PHANTOM FOOTSTEPS

BEFORE I left the west of Ireland, I set out one day to investigate a case of haunting by fairies, which was alleged to take place nightly at the junction of four cross roads on the southern slope of the Wicklow mountains.

I found a spot that seemed to correspond with the description of the scene of the haunting given me by my informant, and kept a vigil there for two consecutive nights without experiencing any of the anticipated results. However, I intended giving the place another trial, and accordingly set out; but when within half a mile or so of my destination, I began to feel very tired, and having a bad cold on me besides, I decided to put up at a cottage I espied a short distance off, instead of pursuing my way further.

The cottage stood a little back from the main road, perhaps a hundred yards or so, and was connected with it by a narrow lane. The situation was one of intense loneliness; the nearest village was a good two miles away, and few people, other than occasional cyclists, ever passed along the high road after nightfall. At the time I am speaking of, the cottage was tenanted by a couple named Mullins. The man was a drover, and his wife one of the tallest women I have ever seen; she possessed, moreover, a pair of green-grey eyes, and these were

remarkable, not only for their curious colouring, but for the impression they gave one that they were perpetually trying not to see too much. Apart from these peculiarities, she seemed ordinary enough, and I felt I was in the house of very worthy and hard-working people.

I went to bed early and was given the only spare room in the cottage. It faced the front and was immediately over the tiny parlour. As the linen was spotless and felt thoroughly dry, I had no scruples about getting in between the sheets, and, stretching myself out, I was soon fast asleep.

I awoke with violent palpitations of the heart to find the room bathed with moonlight ; and, as all was absolutely silent, I concluded it must be far on into the night. Suddenly I heard footsteps—footsteps in the distance, running at a well-regulated pace. They rang out sharp and clear in the still air, and gradually became more and more distinct. I was wondering who the person could be, out at such an hour, when a dog, apparently in the yard at the back of the house, set up the most unearthly howling. The next moment I heard Mrs. Mullins speak, and, inadvertently, I listened.

" John," she said, " do you hear the dog ? "

" I should be deaf and dumb if I didn't," Mullins replied sleepily. " What is it ? "

" What is it, indeed ! Why the dog never barks like that unless there is a spirit about. Do you remember those knocks on the door the night Uncle Mike died, and how the dog howled then ? There's something of the same sort about to-night. Listen ! "

The steps very were near now. I listened intently. The runner, I thought, must be wearing very extraordinary boots, for every step, so it seemed to me, was accompanied by a peculiar and almost metallic click.

" John," Mrs. Mullins suddenly resumed, " do you hear those steps ? What are they ? It's the first time in my life I've heard anyone running along the high road like that at this time of night. Hark ! They've got to the turning

—they're in the lane—they're coming here ! Get up at once ; go and bolt the front door. The thing's evil—evil, I'm sure, and it's someone of us here it's after."

The steps grew rapidly nearer, and Mullins, stumbling hastily down the stairs, bolted both the doors and swung to the little wooden shutters. A moment later, and I heard the steps come right up to the door. There was a momentary pause, then a series of terrific knocks.

" Cross yourself, John; for God's sake cross yourself !" Mrs. Mullins cried. " And may the Holy Virgin protect us." She then started praying loudly and vehemently, and, whether it was the effect of her prayers or not, the knocking gradually diminished in violence, and then ceased altogether.

" Come on up, John," Mrs. Mullins called out ; " the thing, whatever it is, has ceased troubling us, and we may go to sleep in peace."

Mullins, needing no second bidding, joined his wife, and once again the whole place was wrapped in silence.

I must confess that, whilst the knocking continued, I had no desire whatever to look out of the window, but the moment it was over I got up and peered out. I could see right down the lane and for some distance along the high road.

There was no sign of anyone or anything that could in any way account for the disturbance—the landscape was brilliantly illuminated with moonlight, every stick and stone being plainly visible, and all nature seemed to be sleeping undisturbedly, as if no interruption in its ordinary routine had occurred. I got back into bed, and, falling into a gentle doze, slept soundly till the morning. After breakfast, Mrs. Mullins said, " You're not thinking of spending another night here, sir, are you ? "

" Why, no," I replied. " I must be back in Dublin at my work by this afternoon."

" I'm glad of that, sir," she went on ; " because I couldn't let you stay. I suppose you heard the rapping, sir ? "

" I did," I replied ; " and the footsteps—how do you account for them ? "

" Only in one way," she said ; " they came after you. At least, that was my impression, and my impressions are seldom wrong. I seemed to see some terrible form—half animal and half human—something indescribably grotesque and unnatural—something, my instinct tells me, was wanting to get at you."

Her description of the figure reminded me so strongly of the queer thing that tried to strangle me in the house near the Waterloo Road, that I narrated my experience to her.

" You may depend upon it, sir," she said when I had finished, " that the ghost you have just told me about and the one that came to the cottage last night are the same. I have heard that spirits will sometimes attach themselves to persons who have been staying in the house they haunt, and that they will leave the house with them and follow them wherever they go. I only hope and trust that this one will never do you any harm, and that you will succeed in ridding yourself of it, but my husband and I feel, asking your pardon, that we should not like to have you sleep here again."

I did not tell her that even had she been willing, nothing on earth would have induced me to stay, for whether she was right in her theory about the steps or not, the neighbourhood had lost all its charms for me. Indeed, when next I had a ghostly visitation, I hoped I should be quartered in a less isolated spot.

My aunt, Mrs. Meta O'Donnell, tells me that a relative of hers once had a remarkable encounter with fairies on the road between Ballinanty and the village of Hospital in County Limerick.

He was driving home one evening in his jaunting car, unaccompanied save by his servant, Dunkley, who was sitting with his back to him, when a number of little people—fairies—sprang on the car, and clambering up, tried to pull him off.

Finding that, owing to the vigour with which they pulled, he was actually slipping from his seat, he appealed to his servant for assistance ; and the latter, doing as he was told, held on to him with all his strength, and thus prevented the little people from dragging him to the ground. Mrs. Meta O'Donnell is absolutely sure that her relative never took stimulants of any sort, and that he was in a perfectly normal state of mind when this event happened.

Nor is this road haunted only by fairies, for Mrs. Meta O'Donnell again tells me that this same relative of hers, when driving home on another occasion—this time with several friends—saw a man on horseback, in a hunting coat, suddenly leap the hedge, and, after riding for some distance by the side of the car, abruptly vanish. Two of the men who were with him, she believes, also witnessed this phenomenon.

It is a long step, seemingly, from the fairy to the banshee, but these two types of spirit have at least one trait in common, namely, exclusiveness; and the banshee, even more emphatically than the fairy, will have nought to do with the alien. It will attach itself only to the family of bona-fide Irish origin, only to the clan that has been associated with Irish soil for many generation.

With the kind permission of Mr. Ralph Shirley, I will here introduce, making only slight alterations, a few extracts from an article of mine on the banshee, which appeared in the " Occult Review " for September, 1913 :

" Contemporary with fairies and the Feni, phantoms typical of the great lone hills of Wicklow and Connemara, and of the bare and wind-bitten cliffs of Galway, may well have been the banshees, which, attaching themselves for divers reasons to various chieftains and sons of chieftains, eventually became recognised as family ghosts or familiars.

" Many people have fallen in the error of imagining all banshees are moulded after one pattern. Nothing could be more fallacious. The banshee of the O'Rourkes, for

example, does not resemble that of the O'Donnells; there are many forms of the banshee, each clan having a distinct one—or more than one—of its own. Some of the banshees are fair to look at, and some old, and foul, and terrifying; but their mission is invariably the same, e., to announce a death or some great family catastrophe.

"The banshee is never joyous; it is always either sad or malevolent. Sometimes it wails once, sometimes three times—the wail in some degree, but not altogether, resembling that of a woman in great trouble or agony; sometimes, again, it groans; and sometimes it sighs, or sings. In some clans the demonstrations are both visual and auditory, in others only visual; and in others, again, only auditory. There is no really old clan but has its banshee, and few members of that clan who are not, at some time or other of their lives, made aware of it.

"How well I recollect as a child being told by those who had experienced it, that a dreadful groaning and wailing had been heard the night prior to the death of a very near relative of mine in Africa. I enquired what made the wailing, and was informed 'the banshee,' or the ghost woman, who never fails to announce the death of an O'Donnell.

"Years later, when in the extreme West of England, my wife and I were awakened one night by a terrible wail, which sounded just outside our door. Beginning in a low key, it rose and rose, until it ended in a shrill scream, that in time died away in a horrible groan. The idea of the banshee at once flashed through my mind, for I felt none other but a banshee could have made such a sound.

"Still, to satisfy my wife, I jumped out of bed and went on to the landing; all was dark and silent, and outside their bedrooms were assembled the rest of the household, terrified, and eager to have an explanation of what had happened. We searched the whole house and the waste land outside, but there was nothing which

could in any way account for the noise, and in the morning I received news of the death of someone very closely related to me. . . . Whilst some writers are inclined to treat the subject jocularly, and attribute the banshee either to obviously absurd physical causes, or to the abnormally imaginative powers they insist are the birthright of all Irishmen, others dive into the pseudo-profound compilations of modern Theosophy, and re-appear with the pronouncement that banshees are not spirits at all—not entities hailing from the superphysical world—but mere thought germs, created by some remote ancestor of a clan, and wafted down from one generation to another of his descendants, an idea as nonsensical as it is extravagant, and which will not for an instant hold water when looked into by those who have had a bona-fide experience of the banshee or any other ghostly phenomenon. Indeed, it is only the latter who are capable of making observations of any value on such a subject, and all effort to describe or account for the superphysical by those who have never experienced it, no matter whether those efforts are made by theosophical savants, professional mediums or scientific experts, are, in my opinion, weightless, colourless and futile.

"A geologist may describe the hydrosphere, and an astronomer the moon, and their descriptions may be swallowed with tolerable composure and assurance, because we know that the laws of similarity and analogy, when applied to the physical, generally hold good; but no scientist can teach us anything about spiritual phenomena, because such things are actually without the realm of science, just as the game of marbles is entirely without the province of theology. It is our sensations, and our sensations *only*, that can guide and instruct us when dealing with the superphysical. I have heard the dying screams of a woman murdered beneath my window; I have heard on hill and plain the cries of coyottes, panthers, jackals and hyenas; and I have

many times listened to the dismal hooting of night birds, when riding alone through the seclusion of giant forests ; but there is something in the banshee's cry that differs from all these, that fills one with a fear and awe, far—immeasurably far—beyond that produced by a sound which is merely physical. Imagine then what it is to be haunted all one's life by such a grim harbinger of woe, to have it ever trailing in one's wake, always ready and, maybe, eager to make itself heard the moment it detects, by its extraordinary and unhuman powers, the advent of death. One curious idiosyncrasy of the banshee is that it never manifests itself to the person whose death it is prognosticating. Other people may see or hear it, but the doomed one never, so that when every one present is aware of it but one, the fate of that one may be regarded as pretty well certain.

" And now once again, whence comes the banshee ? From heaven or from hell ? What is it ? It is impossible to say ; at the most one can only speculate. Some banshees appear to be mournful only ; others unquestionably malevolent ; and whereas some very closely resemble a woman, even though of a type long passed away, others, again, differ so much from our conception of any human being, that we can only imagine them to be spirits that never have been human, that belong to a genus wholly separate and distinct from the human genus, and that have only been brought into contact with this material plane through the medium of certain magical or spiritual rites practised by the Milesians, but for some unknown reason discontinued by their descendants. This appears to me quite a possible explanation of the origin of the banshee.

" One realizes, when dabbling in spiritualism to-day, one of the greatest dangers incurred is that of attracting to one certain undesirable, mischievous, and malignant spirits—call them elementals if you will—which, when so attracted, stick to one like the proverbial leech. And what happens to-day may very well have happened

thousands of years ago ; in all probability, the Unknown never changes ; its ways and habits may be as constant as those of Nature, guided by laws and principles which may at times vary, but which, nevertheless, undergo no material alteration. The superphysical, attracted to the ancients as it is attracted to us to-day, would adhere to them as it now adheres to us. I cannot surmise more.

" Supposing then that this theory accounts for the one class of banshee, what accounts for the other—the other that so nearly tallies with the physical ? Are the latter actual phantoms of the dead ; of those that died some unnatural death, and have been earth-bound and clan-bound ever since ? Maybe they are. Maybe they are the spirits of women, prehistoric or otherwise, who were either suicides or were murdered, or who themselves committed some very heinous offence ; and they haunt the clan to which they owed their unhappy ending ; or, in the event of themselves being the malefactors, the clan to which they belonged. From all this we can conclude that, whilst the origin and constitution of banshees vary, their mission is always the same—they are solely the prognosticators of misfortune. A sorry possession for anyone ; and yet, how truly in accord with the nature of the country—with its general air of discontent and barrenness, with its rain-sodden soil and gloomy atmosphere—as an unkind critic might say, could anyone imagine the presence of cheerful spirits under such conditions ?

" But the banshee has the one admirable trait which the average Englishman obstinately refuses to recognize in the material Irish—the trait of loyalty and constancy. It never forsakes the object of its attachment, but clings to it in all its vicissitudes and peregrinations with a loyalty and persistency that is unmatchable. It is thoroughly Irish, essentially Irish ; the one thing, apart from disposition and character, that has remained exclusively Irish through long centuries of robbery and oppression ; and which, in spite of assertions to the

contrary, never has been, nor ever will be shared by other than the genuine clansman.

"The banshee is most fastidious in its tastes—it will have none of the pseudo-celt; none of the individual who, possessing an absolutely English name, and coming entirely of English forefathers, terms himself Irish merely because his ancestors happen to have settled in Ireland. That is nothing like exact enough for the banshee. Others may talk of it and write of it, but they can never honestly claim it; for the banshee belongs wholly and exclusively to the bona-fide O's and Macs—and them, and them only, will it never cease to haunt so long as there is one of them left."

My last experience with a ghost in Dublin took place just after I had been medically examined for the R.I.C., and to my intense grief had been rejected, owing to varicose veins, which the examining doctor told me were of a far too complicated nature to permit of an operation; consequently, although I had been "cramming" for two years, and my prospects of getting through the literary examination were deemed extremely fair, it was futile to go up for it, as all chance of my ever being in the R.I.C. was now at an end.

On the night of my failure to pass the medical I had gone to bed early, as I had a splitting headache, and, after vain efforts, had at length succeeded in falling asleep. I awoke just in time to hear a clock from somewhere in the downstairs premises of the house—I was then lodging in Lower Merrion Street—strike two, and almost immediately afterwards there came a loud laugh, just over my face, and so near to me that I seemed to feel the breath of the laughter fan my nostrils. Nothing I have ever heard before, or have ever heard since, was so repulsive as that laugh—it was the very incarnation of jeering, jibing mockery; of undying, inveterate hate. I felt that nothing but a spirit of unadulterated evil could have made such a noise, and that it had come to gloat over my misfortunes—to let me know how greatly it

rejoiced at the cruel blow I had suffered. I naturally associated it with the ghost that had tried to strangle me, and my heart turned sick within me at the thought that such a horrible species of phantasm was still hovering near me. Should I ever be free from it? I was not quite so frightened, however, as I had been on the occasion of its visit to me in the house near the Waterloo Road, and determining to prevent myself from falling into that kind of paralytic condition again, in which all my muscles and faculties had remained alike spell-bound and useless, I sat up. The room was in pitch darkness, and everything was breathlessly still. I waited in this posture for some seconds, my heart beating like a sledge-hammer, and then, deriving assurance from the fact that nothing happened, I got out of bed and struck a light. The door was locked on the inside, and there was nothing in hiding that could in any way account for the noise. I went to the window, and, lifting it gently, peered out into the street. There was no moon, but many stars and lamplights enabled me to see that the street was absolutely empty—not even a policeman was in sight. I leaned far out, and from immediately beneath me, although no one was visible, there suddenly commenced the sound of running footsteps. Ringing out loud and clear, and accompanied by a queer familiar clicking, they seemed to follow the direction of the street towards Ely Place. I wanted to get back to bed, for I was lightly clad, and the air was cool and penetrating, but something compelled me to keep on listening, and so I remanied with my neck craned over the window-sill, till the steps gradually grew fainter and fainter, and suddenly ceased altogether. And with their termination this early period of my ghostly experiences in Dublin terminated, too.

CHAPTER III

SOME STRANGE CASES IN SCOTLAND

I RETURNED to England in that " tub-like " old relic of mid-Victorian steamboats, " The Argo "—long since defunct, but which for many years sailed to and from Dublin and Bristol with as many passengers and cattle as could be crammed, with any degree of safety, into her dingy and clumsy-looking hulk. I remember the passage well, for two of my fellow students were on board, and we spent nearly all the time on deck, telling ghost tales, and earnestly discussing the possibility of a future life. In the end we made a solemn compact, whereby it was agreed that the one who died first would try his level best to give some kind of spirit demonstration to the other two. Both my friends died within a few years of that date, and within three weeks of each other. The one, who had a commission in a cavalry regiment, was killed at the Battle of Omdurman, and the other, who having followed in the footsteps of his distinguished father, had become a novelist of great promise, was kicked to death by a horse. The day after the death of the former, as I was busily engaged writing the first chapter of my novel, " For Satan's Sake," a portion of the mantel-piece in the room in which I was working suddenly fell with a loud crash on to the grate. Of course, the incident may not

have had anything to do with the death of my friend, but it was nevertheless remarkable, as previously nothing in the nature of a flaw had been noticeable in the condition of the mantel-piece. My other friend died—as I subsequently learned, i.e., after the incident I am about to narrate had occurred—at ten o'clock one Friday morning, and that afternoon as I was changing for football, the grandfather clock on the landing outside my bedroom suddenly struck ten. I went to look, and the hands pointed to three. There had been nothing amiss with the striking before, and there was nothing amiss with the striking after.

These were the only phenomena I experienced at the time these two friends of mine died.

* * * * * *

On arriving at Bristol, I spent some weeks in the West of England and then journeyed north to Scotland. My original intention had been to spend a few weeks with an old Clifton friend of mine, whose father owned an estate near Inverary ; but, on arriving at Glasgow, I heard of such a promising case of haunting in that city, that, unable to resist the temptation of investigating it, I decided to postpone my journey west. The case, as outlined to me in the first instance, was this :—

A Glasgow solicitor, named James McKaye, desirous of taking a house close to his office, went one morning to look at one in Duke Street. He went there alone, and, carefully closing the front door behind him, proceeded to wander from room to room, beginning with the basement.

As he was going upstairs to the first floor, he suddenly heard footsteps following him. He turned sharply round ; there was no one there. Thinking this was odd, but attributing it to the acoustic properties of the walls, he continued his ascent. Having arrived on the first landing, he went into one of the rooms. The steps followed him. A brilliant idea then occurred to him—he stamped his foot. There was no echo. He turned round and went into the next room, and the steps once again

accompanied him. Then he grew frightened. It was broad daylight, the sun was shining brilliantly and the birds were singing; but there was something in this house that jarred on him horribly—a something that was completely out of humour with the golden sunbeams and the cheerful chirping of the sparrows. The day was hot, and the sun was pouring in through the blindless windows; but in spite of this the rooms were icy, and he was deliberating whether it was worth while to explore the house further, when he caught sight of a shadow on the wall. It was not his own shadow. It was that of a man with his arms stretched out horizontally on either side of him, and whereas the right arm was complete in every detail, the left had no hand. James McKaye now yielded to an ungovernable terror and rushed frantically out of the house.

One would naturally think that after all this McKaye would have vowed never to go near the place again. Nothing of the sort. The house fascinated him. He could not get it out of his mind ; he even dreamed of it ; dreamed of it in connection with some mystery that he must solve—that he alone could solve. Besides, there was not another house in the town so conveniently situated, nor so cheap. Consequently, he took it, and within a fortnight had moved in with all his family and household goods. For the first few weeks everything went swimmingly, and McKaye, who was shrewd, even for a Scot, congratulated himself upon having made such an excellent bargain.

Then occurred an incident which recalled sharply the day he had first seen the place. He was writing some letters one morning in his study, when the nurse-maid entered, white and agitated. "Oh, do come to the nursery, sir," she implored ; "the children are playing with something that looks like a dog, and yet isn't one. I don't know what it is!" And she burst out crying.

"You're mad," McKaye said sharply and, springing to his feet, he ran upstairs.

On reaching the nursery, the blurred outline of something like a huge dog or wolf came out of the half-open door, and raced past him, so close that he distinctly felt it brush against his clothes.

Where it went he could not say; he was thinking of the children, and did not stop to look. Oddly enough, the children were not a bit afraid; on the contrary, they were pleased and curious. "What a strange doggy it was, Daddy!" they cried; "it never wagged its tail, like other doggies, and whenever we tried to stroke it, it slipped away from us—we never touched it once."

Sorely puzzled, McKaye told his wife, and the two decided that if anything further happened, they must leave the house.

That night McKaye happened to sit up rather late; at last he got up, and was about to turn off the gas, when he felt his upstretched hand suddenly caught hold of by something large and soft, that did not seem to have any fingers. He was so frightened that he screamed; whereupon his hand was instantly released, and there was a loud crash overhead. Thinking something had happened to his wife, he rushed upstairs, and found her sitting up in bed and talking in her sleep. She was apparently addressing a black, shadowy figure that was crouching on the floor, opposite her. As McKaye approached, the thing moved towards the wall, and vanished.

Mrs. McKaye then awoke, and begged her husband to take her out of the house at once, as she had dreamed most vividly that an appalling murder had been committed there, and that the murderer had come out of the room with outstretched hands, asking her to look at them. McKaye, who had had quite enough of it, too, promised to do as she wished, and before another twenty-four hours had passed the house was once again empty.

These were the bare facts of the case, and as they were given me by one of his clients, I had no difficulty in obtaining an interview with Mr. McKaye, who, I was told, still had the keys of the house. It was not, however,

so easy to obtain consent to spend a night on the premises, and he would only permit me to do so on the condition that he himself accompanied me, and that I promised to keep the visit a profound secret.

The evening chosen for our enterprise proved ever memorable.

The rain came down in torrents, and the wind—a veritable tornado—made any attempt to hold up an umbrella utterly impossible. Indeed, it was as much as I could do to hold up myself, whilst, to add to my discomfort, at almost every step I plunged ankle-deep in icy cold puddles. At length, drenched to the skin, I arrived at the house.

McKaye was standing on the doorstep, swearing furiously. He could not, so he said, find the key. However, he produced it now, and we were soon standing inside, shaking the water from our clothes. Those were the days before pocket flashlights had become general, and we had to be content with candles.

We each lighted one, and at once commenced to search the premises to make sure no one was in hiding.

The house, as far as I can recollect, consisted of four storeys and a basement. None of the rooms were very large; the wall-papers were hideous, and I remember thanking my stars that I was not called upon to live in such hopelessly inartistic quarters. McKaye asked me if I could detect anything peculiar in the atmosphere, but I could only detect extreme mustiness, and told him so. I fancied he seemed very fidgety and ill at ease; however, as he was a much older man than myself, and had some experience of the house, I felt perfectly safe with him. After we had been in all the rooms, we descended to the ground floor, and commenced our vigil on the staircase leading from the hall to the first landing.

"I think we stand more chance of seeing something here than anywhere else," McKaye said; "and in the case of anything very alarming happening, we are close to the front door."

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" We both looked in the direction he indicated "

He spoke only half in fun and I observed that his fingers twitched a good deal and that his eyes were never at rest.

"Oughtn't we to put out the candles?" I said. "Ghosts surely materialise much more readily in the dark." But he would not hear of it. All his experiences, he said, had taken place in the light, and he believed only spoof ghosts at séances required the opposite conditions. Then he regaled me once more with all that had happened during his occupation of the house. He was still telling me, when there came a loud rat-rat at the door.

"That's a policeman," he said; "he must have seen our light." He spoke truly, for, when we opened the door, a burly figure in helmet and cape stood on the step and flashed his dripping bull's-eye in our faces. On hearing McKaye's name the constable was instantly appeased, and, when we mentioned ghosts, he laughed long and loud. "Well, gentlemen," he said, "you won't never be alarmed by a happarition so long as you have that dog with you. I bet he would scare away any number of ghosts, and burglars, too. If I may be so bold as to ask, what breed do you call him? I've never seen anything quite like him before," and he waved his lamp towards the stairs. We both looked in the direction he indicated, and there, half way up the stairs, with its face apparently turned towards us, was the black, shadowy outline of some shaggy creature, which to me looked not so much like a dog as a bear. It remained stationary for a moment or so, and then, retreating backwards, seemed to disappear into the wall.

"Well, gentlemen, good-night," the policeman said, lowering his lamp, "it's time I was going." He turned on his heel, and was walking off, when McKaye called him back.

"Wait a moment, constable," he said, "and we'll come with you."

He cast a swiftly furtive glance around him as he spoke, then, blowing out the lights, he caught me by the arm and dragged me away.

"But the dog, sir," the policeman said, as the front door closed behind us with a bang; "it ain't come out!"

"And it never will," McKaye responded grimly. "You have seen the ghost, constable, or at least one of them."

I have never had an opportunity of visiting the house again, but for aught I know to the contrary, it still stands there, and is still haunted.

From Glasgow I went on to Inverary, where I had the most delightful time, fishing and shooting.

I then went to Perth, and there, quite by chance, met a Mr. and Mrs. Rowlandson, who informed me that they were just quitting a badly haunted house on the outskirts of the town. The name of the house was "Bocarthe." It was their own, and had only been built a year, but they could not possibly remain in it, they told me, owing to the perpetual disturbance to which they were subjected. They were just beginning a detailed description of the manifestations, when I begged them to desist. I would like, I explained, with their permission, to investigate the case, and I thought it would be better to do so without knowing the nature of the hauntings, as in these circumstances—should my experience happen to tally with theirs—there could be no question either of suggestion or of imagination.

I had resolved to conduct all my investigations with an absolutely open mind, and I intended, when once I had satisfied myself that the phenomena were objective, to try and alight upon some code whereby I could communicate with them, and learn from them something certain—something definite, at all events, about the other world. To what extent I have succeeded I shall make it the purpose of this volume to reveal.

But to continue: "What strikes us as so extraordinary about the whole thing," the Rowlandsons said, "is that a new house, with absolutely no history attached to it, for we were the first people who ever inhabited it, and we can assure you," they added

laughingly, "there were no murders or suicides there during our occupancy, should be haunted. Our neighbours declare that we must have brought the ghost with us."

I told them I thought it quite possible that such might be the case, and narrated to them my experiences in Dublin. They appeared to be greatly interested; and were, moreover, quite willing, provided I promised them not to discuss the matter too openly, as they wanted to let the house, that I should spend a few nights at "Bocarthe." They were, in fact, rather anxious to know if anything unusual still took place there. Thinking, perhaps, that I might not like to go alone, they gave me an introduction to a young friend of theirs, Dr. Swinton, who, they thought, might be prevailed upon to accompany me; and, before I left them, all the preliminaries relating to my visit to "Bocarthe" were satisfactorily arranged.

That same day the Rowlandsons went to Edinburgh, where they told me they intended living, and the following day at noon I wended my way to the house they had vacated. As there was no story connected with "Bocarthe," I set to work to make enquiries about the ground on which it stood, and instead of learning too little, I learned too much. An old minister, who looked fully eighty, was sure that the ground in question, until it was built upon quite recently, had been grazing land ever since he was a boy, and that it had never witnessed anything more extraordinary than the occasional death of a sheep or a cow that had been struck by lightning. An equally aged and equally positive postmistress declared that the ground had never been anything better than waste land, where, amid rubbish heaps galore, all the dogs in the parish might have been seen scratching and fighting over bones. Another person remembered a pond being there, and another a nursery garden; but from no one could I extract the slightest hint as to anything that could in any way account for the haunting.

When I entered the house, I thought I had seldom seen such a cheerful one : the rooms were light and lofty, and about them all there was an air of genialty, that hitherto, at all events, I had never dreamed of associating with ghosts.

Dr. Swinton joined me in the evening, but although we sat up till long after dawn, we neither saw nor heard anything we could not account for by natural causes. We repeated the process for two more nights, and then, feeling that we had given the house a fair trial, we concluded it was either no longer haunted, or that the hauntings were periodical, and might not occur again for years. I wrote to Mr. Rowlandson, upon returning the keys of the house, and, in reply, received the following letter from him :—

No. —, C—— Crescent,
Edinburgh.
November 8th, 1893.

Dear Mr. O'Donnell,

Many thanks for the keys. No wonder you did not see our ghost ! It is here, and we are having just the same experiences in this house as we had in "Bocarthe." If you would care to stay a few nights with us, on the chance of seeing the ghost, we shall be delighted to put you up.

Yours, etc.,
Robert Rowlandson.

I was obliged to return home very shortly, in order to decide definitely and speedily what I intended to do for a living ; but although I knew I had little or no time to waste, I could not resist the Rowlandsons' kind invitation to try and see their ghost, and accordingly accepted.

They lived in C—— Crescent. When I arrived there, I found the entire household in a panic, the ghost having appeared to one and all during the previous night.

"It was so terrible," Mrs. Rowlandson said, "that I can't bear even to think of it, and shall certainly never forget it. One of the maids fainted, and was so ill afterwards, we were obliged to have the doctor, and all have given notice to leave."

"Did nothing of the sort happen before you went to 'Bocarthe'?" I ventured to ask.

"No," Mr. Rowlandson replied, "not a thing. We were then sceptics where ghosts were concerned, but we're certainly not sceptical now."

"Do you think it possible," I said, "that the ghost is attached to some piece of old furniture? I have read of such cases."

Mr. Rowlandson shook his head.

"No," he said, "we have no old furniture, all our furniture is modern and new; at least, it was new when we came to 'Bocarthe.'"

"Then, if the ghost is neither attached to the house, nor to the ground, nor to the furniture, it must surely be attached to some person," I remarked. "I have read that one of the dangers of attending Spiritualistic Séances is that spirits occasionally attach themselves to people, and can only be got rid of with great difficulty. I suppose no one in the house has gone in for Spiritualism?"

"I can safely say I haven't," Mr. Rowlandson laughed; "and you haven't, either, Maud, have you?" he said, looking at his wife.

Mrs. Rowlandson flushed.

"The only Spiritualist I ever knew," she stammered, "was—you know, dear, whom I mean——"

Mr. Rowlandson raised his eyebrows and stared at her in astonishment.

"I don't," he said. "Who?"

"Ernest Dekon!"

"Dekon!" Mr. Rowlandson ejaculated. "Dekon! Why, of course, I might have guessed Spiritualism was in his line. Some years ago, Mr. O'Donnell," he went on,

turning to me, " my wiife met this Mr. Dekon at a ball given by a mutual friend, and from that time, up to his death, he persecuted her with his undesirable attentions. I never knew anyone so persistent."

" He resented your marriage, of course," I remarked.

" Resented it ! " Mr. Rowlandson responded ; " I should rather think he did, though to everyone's surprise he came to it. Ye Gods ! I shall never forget the expression on his face, as we caught sight of him in the vestibule of the church. Talk about Satan ! Satan never looked half as evil."

" And Mr. Dekon was a Spiritualist ! " I said.

" He was very keen on séances," Mrs. Rowlandson interposed. " Most keen, and was at one time always trying to persuade me to go to one with him."

" I never knew that," Mr. Rowlandson exclaimed.

" Perhaps not," his wife said demurely. " You see, you don't know everything. However, I never went."

" And how did he die ? " I ventured.

" Suicide," Mr. Rowlandson said. " He shot himself, and was dastardly enough to leave a note behind him, pinned to the toilet-cover of his dressing-table, stating that his death was entirely due to the heartless conduct of my wife."

" When was that, Mr. Rowlandson ? " I asked.

" Let me see," Mr. Rowlandson soliloquised. " We have been married not quite eighteen months. About fifteen months ago—shortly before we came to ' Bocarthe.' "

" I know what's in your mind," Mrs. Rowlandson observed. " You think that very possibly it is the spirit of Ernest Dekon that is troubling us. Do you really think it could be ? "

" From what you have told me," I said, " I should say that it is more than likely. The mere fact of his having been a Spiritualist would mean that he had, in some measure, got in touch with the Unknown ; so that on passing over with his mind solely concentrated on

revenge, he would, in all probability, speedily become closer acquainted with those spirits whom he had known here—not a very high class, but apparently the only class that a séance can attract—and these would undoubtedly aid him in his attempt to come back and annoy you."

Mrs. Rowlandson gave vent to an exclamation of dismay. "I have always felt," she said, "that there might be some mysterious connection between Ernest Dekon and the dreadful thing we have seen."

"Of course," I added, "that is only a suggestion on my part. When does the phenomenon usually appear?"

"At all times, and when we least expect it," Mrs. Rowlandson said. "For example, if I am going upstairs alone, it either springs out at me or peers down at me from over the banisters. Or, again, it rouses us in the middle of the night by rocking our bed! Always some alarming trick of that kind."

"Then you could hardly expect it to manifest itself if we all sat here in the dark?"

"Hardly."

"You haven't a photograph of Mr. Dekon, I suppose?" I hazarded.

"A photograph of that scoundrel," Mr. Rowlandson cried. "If he had given her one, it wouldn't have remained long in her possession, I can assure you."

"Well, he never did," Mrs. Rowlandson said, forcing a smile, "but I can describe him."

"I don't know whether that will do much good," I observed. "Because I understand that if one of the lower order of earthbounds, usually called Elementals, wanted to 'fool' us, it could easily impersonate him. Dekon's phantom would not, of necessity, be very like his material body; it would depend entirely on how much of the animal there was in him; if a great deal, then one might expect to see a creature with a pig's, or some other kind of beast's, head, with only a slight facial resemblance to Dekon. Can you describe his hands?

Because I believe spirits that have lost all other resemblance with the physical body might be identified by some peculiarity in the formation of the fingers."

"Yes," Mrs. Rowlandson said; "I do remember his hands distinctly. They were so ugly! They were long, and red, and the tips were club-shaped; I am sure I should recognise them anywhere."

This conversation took place in the interval between tea and dinner. After dinner we sat in the drawing-room, discussing plans for the night, and finally came to the conclusion that when bed-time came we should retire to our respective rooms, and sit there in the dark, waiting and watching for whatever might happen. It was furthermore agreed that directly anyone saw or heard anything, they should at once summon the others.

We sat up rather late, and it was close on midnight before Mrs. Rowlandson rose, and we all—there were two guests besides myself, a Colonel and Mrs. Rushworth—took our candlesticks, and followed her upstairs. We had mounted the first flight, and had turned the bend leading to the second—the house seemed all stairs—when Mrs. Rowlandson halted, and, looking back at us, said, "Hush! Do you hear anything?"

We stood still and listened. There was a thump, that apparently came from a room just at the top of the stairs—then another—and then a very curious sound, as if something was bounding backwards and forwards over bare boards with its feet tied together. At a signal from Mr. Rowlandson, we immediately blew out our lights. A church clock solemnly struck twelve. We heard it very distinctly, as the Rowlandsons, being enthusiasts for fresh air, kept every window in the house wide open. The reverberation of the final stroke had hardly ceased when a loud gasp from someone in front of me sent a chilly feeling down my spine.

At the same moment the darkness ahead of us was dissipated by a faint, luminous glow. As I watched, the glow speedily intensified, and suddenly took the shape of

a cylindrical column of six or seven feet in height, and this in turn developed with startling abruptness into the form of something so shockingly grotesque and bestial that I was rendered speechless.

It is extremely difficult to give a very accurate description of it, because, like the generality of occult phenomena I have experienced in haunted houses, it was a baffling mixture of the distinct and yet vague, entirely without substance, and apparently wholly constituted of vibrating light that varied each second in tone and intensity. I can only say that the impression I derived was that of a very gross or monstrous man.

The head, ill-defined on the crown and sides, appeared to be abnormally high and long, and to be covered with a tangled mass of coarse, tow-coloured hair; the nose seemed hooked, the mouth cruel, the eyes leering. The general expression on the face was one of intense antagonism. The body of the thing was grey and nude, very like the trunk of a silver beech, the arms long and knotted, the hands huge, the fingers red and club-shaped. The latter corresponded exactly with Mrs. Rowlandson's description.

This hideous, baleful apparition was the spirit of animal man, the symbolical representation of all carnal lusts—it was Ernest Dekon—soulless.

But although this spirit was without substance, it was composed of complex forces—forces both physical and mental. It could shut and open doors, move furniture, rap and make sundry other noises, and it could also convey the sensation of intense cold, and the feeling of the most abject fear. I now found myself wondering if it possessed other properties: Was it sensible? Could it communicate in any way?

I was thus deliberating, when the figure seemed to move forward; then someone shrieked. Mr. Rowlandson struck a light, and simultaneously the apparition vanished. The effect it had had on us all was novel and striking—we were all more or less demoralized; and yet

no two of us had seen the ghost the same—and some, Mr. Rowlandson and Mrs. Rushworth, had not seen it at all.

We went back again into the drawing-room and discussed it. Mrs. Rowlandson was the first to speak. She, too, had been particularly impressed by the hands, and she was sure they were the hands of Ernest Dekon.

"I can say nothing about the face," she cried, "as it did not appear to me, but having seen the hands, I am firmly convinced that the ghost is Ernest Dekon, and that it is Ernest Dekon who is tormenting us. Can't any of you think of a plan to get rid of him?"

"Cremation is the only thing I can think of!" cried Colonel Rushworth, who had hitherto been silent. "That is the means employed, I believe, by the hill tribes in Northern India. When a spirit—a spirit they can identify—begins to haunt a place, they dig up the body and burn it, and they say that as soon as the last bone is consumed the haunting ceases. They have a theory that phantoms of dead people and animals can materialise as long as some remnant of their physical body remains. Where did this Ernest Dekon die?"

"In Africa," Mr. Rowlandson said.

"That's capital! If we can find the cemetery, there ought to be no difficulty in getting at the body. The officials are, as a rule, open to bribery. Anyhow, we might try it as an experiment."

I left Edinburgh next day, but I heard some months later from Mr. Rowlandson.

"You may recollect Colonel Rushworth's suggestion," he wrote. "Well, the hauntings have ceased. We are shortly returning to 'Bocarthe'!"

From this I gathered that an attempt to exhume and cremate Ernest Dekon's body had been made, and had proved successful.

CHAPTER IV

I TRAVEL ACROSS THE UNITED STATES, AND DO SOME GHOST HUNTING IN SAN FRANCISCO

Upon leaving Scotland I seriously considered my future, and at length decided to go to Oregon and fruit farm. Though the expedition, through no fault of my own, proved a failure, and I had to return to England within a comparatively short time, I managed, whilst in America, to see and learn a good deal. Apart from visiting Crater Lake, which in those days was one of the wildest spots imaginable, far out of the beat of any but the most adventurous tourist, and seeing the Rogue River Indians in their native element, I spent several weeks in the big cities, and when in San Francisco obtained the services of a guide, and did a nightly tour of China Town, and several of the lesser known subterranean haunts of that city.

It was in San Francisco that I had my first experience with an American ghost. I had been out tramping all day along the southern side of the bay, and it was close on midnight before I got back to the city, feeling thoroughly done up and very footsore. The last chime of twelve o'clock sounded, as I swung wearily round 117th Street into a narrow thoroughfare leading to the obscure quarter of the town in which my financies forced me to

live. As I came within sight of the end house of a block of low old-fashioned buildings, I received something of a shock. I had passed by it that morning and had noticed that it was to let. I was quite sure of this, because there was something about the house that had especially attracted my attention. I was struck with its utter loneliness, its air of past grandeur—so oddly at variance with the modern and mediocre buildings around it—and, peeping in at the windows, I had taken stock of its big oak-panelled apartments devoid of furniture and bestrewn with dust and cobwebs.

Now, to my astonishment, I perceived a bright glow—a kind of phosphorescent light—emanating from one of the rooms on the ground floor. I approached nearer, and, as I leaned against the verandah and peered in, it suddenly seemed to me that the room was no longer empty, but richly carpetted and full of ponderous, old-fashioned furniture. I also seemed to see in the centre of the room a long table covered with a snowy cloth, on which were arranged, in rich profusion, many handsome silver dishes containing a selection of the choicest food. I was dumbfounded. Twelve hours ago there was not a soul to be seen about the house nor a particle of furniture in it, and now !—well, it looked to me as if it never, never had been empty.

Whilst I was thus meditating, my face glued to the window, I thought that a sudden blaze illuminated the room, and by degrees I became conscious of the glare of countless candles, some of the candelabra branching from the walls, and others—of chased silver—standing on the table. I then saw the door at the far end of the apartment open, and a young and charming girl, dressed à la mode de Marie Antoinette, her gown high-waisted and her hair poudré, hurriedly enter. She gave a quick glance at the table, and then, advancing to the fireplace, where, for the first time, I perceived the cheery glow of a huge log of wood, gazed at herself in a large, richly-framed mirror. The reflection evidently pleased her, for

she turned round all smiles ; and then her eyes fell on the window, and on me.

In an instance her countenance changed. Putting a finger to her lips with a great air of mystery, she beckoned to me to come in. I started back in confusion. Again she beckoned, and with such pretty pleading in her eyes that, despite my travel-stained clothes, I yielded. I walked to the front door ; she opened it, and in hushed tones, in which I detected a slight French accent, she bade me welcome.

" We are having a fancy-dress dance," she said, " but none of the guests have as yet arrived, and I want you to come into the ball-room while I rehearse some of the dance music."

She led the way across a big, deserted and strangely silent hall, up a flight of thickly-carpeted stairs, along a dimly lighted corridor, peopled with nothing but odd shadows, to which I could see no material counterparts, and into a room obviously prepared for a ball.

" There is no one about but you and I," she said laughingly. " Only we two ; but someone else will arrive soon. It's not half-past twelve, is it ? "

" No," I said ; " twenty past."

" Ten more minutes ! " She sighed deeply, and her expression, which up to now had been one of gay mischief, changed to one of immeasurable sadness. Then she nodded, suddenly burst out laughing, and casting the most bewitching look at me from out her long, thickly lashed blue-grey eyes, sat down at the piano and began to play a Strauss waltz.

Fascinated though I was by her extreme archness and beauty, I could not stifle the thousand and one uncomfortable thoughts that speedily crowded into my mind.

Who was this strangely friendly and peculiarly solitary girl ? Surely someone must have helped her prepare the house and supper. Where were they ? Besides, she couldn't possibly live in that house alone.

And yet, apart from the music—which seemed to

reverberate through every stick and stone of the building —there was no other sound. I might have been alone with her on some desert island in the far Pacific.

A feeling of intense but wholly unaccountable fear gradually crept over me.

"It is close on the half hour," she suddenly whispered. "Listen!"

She paused for a moment, and I heard a door from somewhere in the lower part of the house open and shut. Then came the sound of muffled footsteps, stealthily feeling their way upstairs. Up and up they came, till they arrived outside the door of the room we were in. There they stopped, and I instinctively felt that their owner was listening.

Presently the girl recommenced playing, and I saw the door-handle began to turn. Slowly, very slowly, the door then opened, and on the floor of the room there appeared a black shadow—vague, indefinite and grotesque. The girl looked over her shoulder at it, and I caught an expression in her eyes that appalled me. Turning to the piano again, she played frantically, and the faster her fingers flew, the nearer crept that shadow.

Suddenly it seemed to shoot right forward, there was a wild scream of terror, a terrific crash, and all was in absolute darkness.

I groped my way frantically towards the door. Something—I could not define what—came into violent collision with me; I staggered back half stunned; and, when my brain cleared, I found myself standing in the street, weak with exhaustion, and—hatless.

I visited the house the next day, when the sun was shining brightly and there were plenty of people about. It was as I had first seen it, untenanted and unfurnished.

I must then have dreamed the whole thing. And what more likely! I was excessively tired at the time, so tired that I felt I could hardly crawl home—and without a doubt I had dropped off to sleep resting against the verandah.

Just out of curiosity, however, I determined to find out if the interior of the house in any way resembled the interior I had seen in my dream, and, with that object in view, I applied to Mr. C.——, the owner, for permission to look over it, frankly telling him why I was doing so. As he appeared to be interested, I described my dream to him in detail, and he afterwards told me the following story :—

"About fifty years ago, a very rich French family occupied the house ; and at the coming of age of their daughter they gave a fancy-dress ball. Among the guests was an Italian, who, being a rejected suitor of the daughter's, had not been invited. He appeared in some grotesque and alarming costume, and when the dance was at its height suddenly overturned a large oil lamp.

"In a moment the whole floor was ablaze ; and before anyone could stop him, he had seized the daughter of the house and hurled her into the midst of the flaming mass. Both he and the girl were burned to death, and the house, although it was thoroughly restored, has never let since."

Having concluded his story, Mr. C.—— said he would like to go with me to the house, and accordingly we set out together.

Though my experience had been only a dream, the coincidence connected with it, which only needed my identification of the scene to be complete, was startling enough, and I grew more and more excited as we neared our destination. When we arrived, Mr. C.—— insisted upon my going first ; and once inside, recognising every feature in the house, I led him first to the room in which I had seen the supper-table laid, and then upstairs to the ball-room, where, to my unspeakable surprise, lying in the middle of the floor, I found my hat.

. . . . . .

What a strangely fascinating city was old San Francisco—that is to say, San Francisco before the last great fire and earthquake ! Consisting of street upon

street, terrace upon terrace of quaintly irregular buildings, to me its atmosphere—as no other atmosphere ever has been—was impregnated with the superphysical. I stayed for a few days in a vast hotel in 117th Street, in which I was the only visitor. I shrewdly suspect it was haunted, although I cannot truthfully say that I ever saw a ghost there, and when I retired to bed up flight after flight of stairs, and past dimly-lighted passages teeming with doors—doors with nothing, nothing material at least, behind them—the only sounds I heard were the hollow echoes of my own footsteps as I went on ascending higher, higher, and higher.

Hearing, however, that I was interested in ghosts, the landlord of the hotel introduced me one day to a Mr. Sweeney, who kept a drug store in Market Street.

"The only experience I ever had with the Supernatural," Mr. Sweeney began, in answer to my interrogations, "took place in this very room. Exactly twelve years ago I engaged the services of a young man called Edward Marsdon. He was very amiable and capable, but highly-strung and hypernormally sensitive. He had been with me about six months, when he came into the parlour one evening with a face like a corpse. 'I've poisoned someone,' he gasped. 'Poisoned someone?' I ejaculated. 'Good God, what do you mean?' 'What I say,' he replied. 'A young fellow came into the store about an hour ago and handed me a prescription. It was signed by Dr. Knelligan, of 111th Street. I made it up, as I thought, all right, and gave it him. A few minutes ago, I found I had put in salts of lemon instead of paregoric.' 'Are you sure?' I asked. 'Certain!' he said, 'as the bottle of salts of lemon is on the table in the laboratory with the stopper out. I must have used it in mistake. The young man will die, if, indeed, he is not dead already, and I am ruined for life.' 'We both are,' I said tersely. 'Ring up Dr. Knelligan at once, and ask him for the young man's address. When you get it, drive round at once and see if you are in time.' It was of

no use scolding him for carelessness—he was upset enough already, and a ' blowing up ' just then might, I thought, result in another tragedy. The only thing to be done was to hope for the best. He rang up Knelligan, got the address, drove round to it, and discovered that the young man had just left. The landlady had no idea where he had gone. To Marsdon this was the last straw. He came back in a state of utter collapse, trembling all over as if he had ague, and, after telling me what happened, he went upstairs and slammed his door. About a quarter of an hour later, my wife, the servant, and I all heard Marsdon, so we thought, come downstairs and go out. The servant then went up to his room to make the bed, and hearing her scream out, I ran upstairs, to find her standing in the middle of the floor, wringing her hands, whilst Marsdon was sitting in a chair—dead ! He had been dead some minutes. That, Mr. O'Donnell, was the beginning of the strange occurrences here. If it was not Marsdon whom we all heard go out, who could it have been ? There was no one in the house but we three, and the body in the chair upstairs, so that it must have been Marsdon's ghost. Well, from that day on, we had no peace.

" Footsteps, which we all recognised as Marsdon's, for he had a most peculiar lumping kind of walk, trod up and down the stairs all hours of the day and night, and frequently when I was in the laboratory mixing medicines I was strongly conscious of some presence standing close beside me and watching everything I did. One day my wife saw him. She was going out, and wanting some money, she called to me. As I did not answer, she went in search of me, and finding me, as she thought, standing on the hearthrug of the parlour with my back to her, she touched me on the shoulder. The next moment she discovered her mistake. The person whom she had mistaken for me turned round, and she found herself confronted with the white, scared countenance of Edward Marsdon. She started back with a loud shriek, and

Marsdon walked out of the room, and apparently right through the servant who came running in to see what was the matter. My wife asked the maid if she had seen anything, and the latter said, 'No, only a dark shadow seemed to fall right across me, and just for a second or so I felt miserably depressed.' A week or so afterwards he was again seen; this time by my wife and the maid. They met him on the stairs. He appeared to be under the influence of some very painful emotion, and he passed them at a great rate, and so near that they felt his clothes—apparently quite material—brush against them. He disappeared in the laboratory, and on their entering it immediately afterwards, there was no one there. Something of this nature—either auditory or visual, or both—now happened pretty well daily, until one morning a young man came to the store to see me. 'I am the young man,' he said, 'to whom your assistant gave that unfortunate mixture. I have just returned to San Francisco, and have heard all about it. The medicine was perfectly all right. I drank it directly I left here, and it did me the world of good. There was not even the suspicion of poison in it. Marsdon was labouring under some extraordinary delusion. If only he had told my landlady about it when he called and found I had gone, she could have given him the glass I had drank out of, which doubtless contained some dregs of the stuff—at any rate, a sufficient quantity for analysis. I am told there are rumours afloat that his apparition has been seen several times since he died; not that I believe in such things as ghosts.'

"'Whether you believe in them or not,' I said quietly, 'it is a fact Edward Marsdon has both been seen and heard.' 'Then I hope,' he said, 'my visit here to-day will put matters all right, and that his poor, wandering spirit, learning that I am alive and well, will find rest, and trouble you no more.' He then bid me good-morning and walked towards the door. 'My God!' he suddenly cried, coming to an abrupt halt, 'there he is!' I looked,

and as sure as I am sitting here, Mr. O'Donnell, there was Edward Marsdon, just as I had known him in life, standing on the pavement with his face glued to the window, peering in at us. The expression in his eyes was one of infinite joy and astonishment.

"I took a step or two towards him with the intention of speaking, when he immediately vanished, and from that day to this the hauntings have entirely ceased."

CHAPTER V

A HAUNTED OFFICE IN DENVER

After leaving San Francisco, I visited Sacramento, where I bought a pair of braces, suspenders as they call them there, that lasted me for years. They were the very best half-dollar's worth I ever had, and I still have the remains of them stowed away in a big trunk amongst other mementos of the long past.

I can't imagine any city in America hotter than Sacramento in the summer, or more unpleasantly cold in the winter, apart from which there was nothing about the place that caused it to be very deeply impressed on my memory, saving that I met a man in one of the streets one day who was so exactly like an old Clifton College master called Tait that I believed it was he, and accosted him accordingly.

The man gasped at me in amazement. "Why, Jupp," he said, "how on earth have you managed it. It's only ten minutes since I left you eating your dinner in the Eagle Hotel on the other side of the town. Have you wings?"

The moment he spoke I knew he was not Tait, but it took me some time to convince him I was not Jupp; and when he introduced me to the latter half an hour or so later, I was not surprised, for I do not think there

could have been a more striking likeness to myself, even in my own portrait.

The coincidence was all the more remarkable since there was at Clifton College, contemporary with Tait, a master named Jupp, of whose cane I had the most striking recollection. In appearance, however, the Clifton Jupp was not in the least bit like me.

This was the only adventure of note, if one may so designate it, I had during this visit to Sacramento. I went on from there to Denver, where I met one or two relatives of friends of mine in England, and did a little work as a "Free Lance" journalist. It was summer when I had last stayed in Denver, and then the intense heat, combined with an injudicious consumption of fruit and iced water, had brought on a mild attack of cholera, which lift me with a none too favourable impression of the place.

But now all was changed. The weather was much cooler; I was growing acclimatised, and I did not feel altogether among strangers. Consequently my apathy vanished, and, despite the fact that my employment was anything but lucrative, I enjoyed this second stay in Denver immensely.

The town had not been built long. Indeed, ten years previously it had only one anything like orthodox street; so that it was the last place in the world where one would expect to come across a haunted house. Yet I heard of three haunted houses at least whilst I was there.

The one I think most likely to interest my readers I heard of in this way. I had been to the Zoological Gardens, and was returning by tram, when a journalist called Rouillac, with whom I had a very slight acquaintance, came running up to me in a great state of excitement. "O'Donnell," he cried, "I have unearthed something that will interest you—the case of a haunting in an office in Race Street." He then proceeded to give me an account of it.

The office was rented by a Mrs. Bell, a typist who employed two girls, Stella Dean and Hester Holt.

One day Hester Holt failed to put in an appearance.

"If she is ill," Mrs. Bell said to Stella Dean, "she ought to have let me know. There was nothing wrong with her yesterday, was there?"

"Not that I am aware of," Stella Dean replied. "When she parted from me, just across the way, she went off in the best of spirits. I expect she'll turn up all right to-morrow."

The morrow came, and Hester Holt not arriving, Stella Dean was despatched in the dinner-hour to find out what had become of her. She returned looking very white and scared.

"Why, Stella," Mrs. Bell exclaimed. "What on earth's the matter?"

"Hester's gone away without telling anyone where she was going," Stella Dean answered.

"You don't say so," Mrs. Bell cried. "What can have happened?"

"She never went to her lodgings after leaving here; at least, that's what the landlady says," Stella Dean replied. "And she hasn't written, either—but I think you'd better call there yourself; I don't like the woman." And Stella burst out crying.

This was the beginning of the mystery. Mrs. Bell interviewed the landlady, who stuck to her statement that she had neither seen Hester Holt nor heard of her since she had left the house two days ago, presumably to attend business. There had been no words between them, she said, and Hester had seemed as usual, perfectly happy. She was a singularly reserved girl, and never mentioned her family excepting when she went away for her annual holiday. She then requested that all her letters should be forwarded to the address of her married sister.

The landlady, Mrs. Britton, gave this address to Mrs. Bell, and the latter, writing off at once, received an

answer by return of post to say that Hester was not there and no tidings of her had been received for over a month. The married sister, however, made an important statement. She said that one person was sure to know of Hester's whereabouts, and that was Pete Simpkins, the young man with whom she kept company, and was hoping eventually to marry. Mrs. Bell, now keenly interested, hastened off and interviewed Simpkins. To quote her own words, he seemed "a bright, intelligent young man," and exhibited unfeigned astonishment and perturbation on learning of the disappearance of his sweetheart.

"When did you last see her?" Mrs. Bell enquired.

"The day she left you," he responded. "I had been out in the country all day, superintending the building of a large farm some ten miles to the east of this city, and I was cycling home along a very unfrequented route, when I met a buggy. Two girls were in it, and to my amazement, they were Hester and Stella Dean."

"What!" Mrs. Bell cried. "Stella Dean? Are you sure?"

"Absolutely!" Simpkins replied. "I can swear to it. It astonished me because I knew they had been on very bad terms. I was engaged to Stella before I met Hester, but I could not stand her temper. One day she was so enraged with my dog because it snarled at her, that she seized my walking-stick and beat it on the head till it was dead. I found her standing over it, white with fury; and feeling that after what I had witnessed I could never like her again, I broke off our engagement there and then. After that I met Hester Holt at the same house where I had first seen Stella, and we at once became friends. Stella Dean did not like it, but she took on more than was necessary; and Hester told me there had been several very painful scenes between them. Indeed, I understood that out of business hours they were not on speaking terms; hence you can judge of my astonishment when I saw them driving in the buggy side by side."

" It's all very mysterious," Mrs. Bell observed. " If she does not turn up soon, I shall have to inform the police."

The following day, Mrs. Be asked Stella if she had gone for a drive with Hester Holt the evening of the latter's disappearance, and Stella Dean promptly replied, " No ; the last time I saw Hester was when she left here that afternoon. She said good-bye to me as usual on the other side of the road, and I have never set eyes on her since."

She admitted she had once been engaged to Pete Simpkins, but emphatically denied that Hester's keeping company with him had led to any rupture between them. " Hester and I were always on the very best of terms," she said, " and it would be downright mean of anyone to allege otherwise. Besides, I can produce proofs to the contrary."

The next day, as Hester was still missing, Mrs. Bell told the police. The affair was at once inquired into, and Pete Simpkins' story about the buggy was corroborated. Someone else had seen the two girls driving towards the outskirts of the town that same evening ; whilst a car proprietor also came forward and declared that he recollected Miss Holt hiring a buggy from him, but that she had driven off in it alone. When the buggy was brought back, he being out, his wife had taken the money for it. But as it was then dusk, she could not possibly swear to the identity of the lady who had paid her, especially as the latter had been so muffled up, presumably on account of the coldness of the night, that practically nothing of her face was visible. She could only say Miss Dean resembled her both in build and height.

Stella Dean was now asked if she could produce an alibi ; and, accordingly, her mother, a very decrepit old lady, declared that Stella had come straight home from the office, and had remained indoors all that evening. To add to the complexity of the affair, someone else

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"Who is that tall, good-looking girl, Stella, that I've seen following you into the building . . . ?"

testified to having seen Hester Holt enter Mrs. Britton's house with a latch key rather late on the night in question ; and this of course made some people suspect Mrs. Britton, but the police could prove nothing, and the matter was eventually dropped.

All this happened about three months before I arrived in Denver.

A week after the disappearance of Hester Holt, Mrs. Bell had a new assistant called Vera Cummings, a very material, practical young lady, the daughter of a farmer somewhere near Omaha.

The day after her arrival, Miss Cummings was busy typewriting in the office with Mrs. Bell and Stella Dean, when she suddenly exclaimed, " How is it that I get convulsed with shivers whenever I sit next to you, Miss Dean ? I don't when I'm sitting next to Mrs. Bell. Eugh ! I feel as if the icy east wind were blowing right through me."

" What nonsense ! " Stella Dean replied ; " you imagine it."

" No, I don't," Miss Cummings retorted ; " I'm going to sit somewhere else," and she moved to the other side of the table.

Mrs. Bell made no comment. An hour or so afterwards, Vera Cummings abruptly observed :

" My, Stella Dean, what long legs you have ! "

" What in the world do you mean ? " was the surprised and rather indignant retort.

" Why, there's no one else on your side of the table, is there ? " Vera Cummings responded ; " and someone's feet keep kicking mine."

" You're dreaming," Stella Dean said, and Mrs. Bell noticed she turned very pale.

Two days now passed uneventfully, but on the third day after the above conversation, Mrs. Bell and the two girls were sitting talking—it was close on the interval for tea, and work was just then very slack—when Vera Cummings remarked, " Who is that tall, good-looking

girl, Stella, that I've seen following you into the building on several occasions. I've watched her keeping close behind you till you get to the elevator, and then she disappears. Where she goes I can't imagine."

"A tall, good-looking girl following me to the elevator," Stella Dean repeated, her cheeks ashy. "What do you mean? I've seen no one. You've dreamt it."

"What was she like?" Mrs. Bell interrupted

Vera Cummings gave a minute description of her.

"Are you sure, Stella, we don't know anyone like her?" Mrs. Bell said quietly. "That description seems to tally exactly with someone we once knew. Someone who used to frequent this place. Can she have returned, do you think?"

"I don't know who you mean," Stella Dean said crossly. "I tell you, I've seen no one."

The next morning they all three arrived simultaneously, and went up together in the elevator. On nearing the office, the sound of a typewriter was heard. They looked at one another in open-mouthed astonishment.

"It must be one of the other clerks in the building," Vera Cummings said. "She's mistaken our room for hers. She's an early bird, anyway, for I reckon there's no one else arrived yet."

"But the door's locked," Mrs. Bell whispered. "See, here's the key!" And she took it out of her pocket as she spoke.

"Well, there's no mistaking the sound, is there?" Vera Cummings laughed. "Click, click, click—that's a typewriter, sure enough. Someone must have got in through the window. My, Stella, how white you are!"

Mrs. Bell glanced sharply at Stella Dean—there was not an atom of colour in her cheeks, and the pupils of her eyes were dilating with terror.

Mrs. Bell then put the key in the lock and opened the door. The typewriter was working away furiously, but there was no one at it, the room was absolutely

empty. It stopped the moment Mrs. Bell crossed the threshold.

That afternoon Stella Dean complained of a headache and went home early. She was in bed for several weeks, and during her absence from the office the strange phenomena there entirely ceased. The morning she returned, Pete Simpkins met her and Vera Cummings just outside the office building. He was bubbling over with excitement.

"She's come back!" he cried. "Come back, and never sent me a word. I *am* glad though . . . Hoorah!"

"Come back!" Stella Dean said, drawing herself up stiffly and regarding him with an angry stare. "Who are you talking about?"

"Hester Holt!" Pete Simpkins ejaculated. "She's just gone into your place. Didn't you know?"

Miss Dean made no reply. She simply pushed past him and walked in. Vera Cummings, however, dawdled behind.

"What's Miss Holt like?" she asked anxiously.

Simpkins described her.

"Why that's the girl I used constantly to see following Stella," she said. "Where she disappears to is a mystery, but it's only one of the many funny things that have happened since I've been here."

She then told him about the typewriter and the feet under the table. Pete Simpkins repeated the story to his friends. Rouillac got hold of it, and hence, as the reader already knows, it was handed on to me.

Rouillac was most anxious that I should go with him to the haunted office straightaway, but it so happened that I had work to finish in a given time, and it was therefore arranged that he should call for me one day the following week.

At the hour appointed, he came. "I fear it's no use," he said; "the office is closed, and it is impossible to get permission to go there. It's come about like this. The day after Stella Dean returned to work, Mrs. Bell was

away—ill—and the two girls were alone. Some time after they had started work, it might have been eleven o'clock or thereabouts, Vera Cummings got up to get a drink of water, and in passing chanced to look at Stella Dean. The latter was leaning forward in her chair and staring with an expression of the utmost horror in her eyes at a despatch case on the floor, which was oscillating violently to and fro. Vera noticed that the despatch case was marked on one side with the letters 'H. H.' 'That's odd,' she cried. 'What makes it do like that—it can't be due to vibration, because there's nothing going by outside. How do you account for it, Stella?'

"'I don't know,' Stella Dean gasped, making a vigorous attempt to appear unconcerned; 'perhaps they're shunting something heavy downstairs.'

"'But we should hear them,' Vera Cummings replied. 'I believe it's Hester Holt; she's dead, and for some mysterious reason her spirit haunts this room.'

"'Nonsense,' Stella Dean stammered. 'How can you be so silly! There are no such things as ghosts.'

"After a while, the case stopped shaking, and the two girls went on with their work. Lunch time came and they both rose to get ready to go out. Vera Cummings had put on her hat, and was walking to the door, when she heard a sharp cry. She turned round, and there was Stella Dean standing in front of the looking glass and gazing at the reflection of a pale face, with two dark menacing eyes glaring fixedly at her from over her shoulder. Vera recognised the face at once. It was that of the girl she had so often seen following Stella, the girl Pete Simpkins had told her was Hester Holt.

"She was so frightened, for she knew for certain now that the thing she was looking at was nothing earthly, that she ran out of the room, and as she crossed the threshold, the door slammed behind her with a terrific crash. Ashamed of her cowardice, she tried the door-handle. It turned, but though she pressed her hardest, the door would not open. She called to Stella, there

was no reply. Greatly alarmed, she ran to the elevator and fetched the man in charge of it. They both pushed the door, and still it would not open. They were deliberating what to do, when they saw the handle suddenly turn and the door gently swing back on its hinges. They peered in. Stella Dean was lying on the hearthrug in a dead faint. She died that same night."

"Died!"

"Yes! Some people fancy she committed suicide, but her mother declares that her heart had long been affected and that she died from syncope. Anyhow, she's dead, and the office is closed, as nothing will persuade Vera Cummings to work there till Mrs. Bell is well enough to return. I tried to get permission to spend a night there, but Mrs. Bell dare not give it. She says the landlord is furious with her for allowing the report to get abroad that the building is haunted, and threatens her with a libel action if he hears anything further."

"That's a great pity," I said; "for few cases have interested me more."

"What do you make of it?" Rouillac asked.

"Why," I replied, "the same as you. There can only be one conclusion. Stella Dean was madly jealous of Hester Holt, and during that drive in the buggy she killed her. Whether the murder was premeditated or done in a sudden fit of blind passion—you tell me her temper at times was very uncontrollable—of course we cannot say. From your sketch of her, however, I am inclined to think she planned the whole thing."

"But what could she have done with the body?" Rouillac said. "The police searched everywhere."

"So they say," I observed; "but the track Simpkins was on when he passed the buggy affords countless opportunities for concealing a body. It is full of deep ditches, creeks, and crevices, covered with a thick and rank vegetation, and the police would take at least a century to explore it. Besides, from what I know of the super-physical I do not think for one moment

that Stella Dean was haunted without some poignant reason."

"Was haunted!" Rouillac observed.

"You said she was dead, didn't you?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," Rouillac replied slowly, "there's no doubt whatever on that point. She's dead right enough. But when Vera Cummings passed by the office this morning, she saw Stella Dean enter it—Stella Dean just as she looked when alive, only very white and in abject terror. She passed right in through the half-open doorway, and, as usual, Hester Holt followed her."

CHAPTER VI.

CASES OF HAUNTINGS IN ST. LOUIS, NEW YORK, AND CHICAGO

ONE of the most extraordinary men I have ever met was Ephraim B. Vandergooch, who, at the time of my travels in America, practised dentistry in 6th Street, St. Louis. Dentists are not, as a rule, the people to associate themselves with physical research, and it is just as well for their patients, perhaps, that they are not, for sitting up all night in dark houses looking for ghosts has an unsteadying effect on the nerves—it is apt to make one "jumpy"—and if a dentist's hand were to jump, it is more than likely that his patient would jump too. Mr. Vandergooch, however, was an exception. He was a ghost hunter, and his investigations had but a slight and temporary effect on his nervous system. His hand was as steady as a rock, his wrists like steel. I went to him to have a tooth filled, and during the operation I asked him if he knew of any haunted houses in the town.

He was a stranger to me then, and of course I expected a superior smile, if not an actual sneer, for, as I have said, dentists are, as a rule, anything but psychics. To my surprise, however, he took me quite seriously, and said he knew of several haunted places in St. Louis, and that nothing interested him more than really first-hand ghost

stories. He told me he had had an experience himself, and narrated the following :—

" A few years ago," he began, " I learned of a haunting in a street of rather older houses than these, close to here ; and as the evidence in this case was to a large extent corroborative, I decided to investigate it. It was Christmas time, and the thought of earthbound spirits pacing up and down cold, empty houses, when all around was warmth and jollity, depressed me. I felt that I must, now that an opportunity had come, try to see them, and if possible do something for them.

" I set out on Christmas Eve, and I admit that when I left the cheerfully lighted thoroughfare, and plunged into the dark silent emptiness of the house, my heart almost failed me. Apart from ghosts there were so many possibilities, and what more likely than that some tramp or criminal had forced an entrance, and was hiding somewhere on the premises. For a few seconds I stood and listened, and then, feeling a trifle more assured, I closed the door gently and advanced cautiously along the wide hall. At each step I took I became more and more sensitive to an atmosphere of intense sadness and desolation—an atmosphere of intense loneliness, loneliness that is without hope—that is perpetual and absolute. It could be felt in all parts of the house, but more particularly, perhaps, in the kitchen, which was built out at the back on the ground floor. I had never been in such a dreary and inhospitable kitchen. The night was bitterly cold and the bare stones sent chilly currents up my legs and back, into my very brain.

" To remain in such a hole till morning was assuredly courting pneumonia or rheumatic fever. I looked at the range, it was covered with rust and verdigris. If only it could be lighted ! Then I uttered an exclamation of joy, for lying in one corner was a pile of wood—boxes, shelves, faggots, etc., intermingled with an assortment of other rubbish. In my early days I had lived on a ranch out west, and the experience I had had there now came in

useful. In a few minutes there was a loud crackling, and the kitchen filled with a ruddy glow. A couple of dresser-drawers served me for a seat, and I was soon ensconced in a tolerably snug position, from which, however, I was prepared to spring at a moment's notice.

" The hours sped by, and the silence deepened.

" At last, just about two o'clock, when I was beginning to think nothing would happen, I heard a door slam somewhere upstairs. This was followed by a series of creaks, and I heard someone cautiously descending the stairs. A great fear now seized me, and had I been able, I should doubtless have beaten a hasty retreat. Instead, I was possessed with a kind of paralysis, which rendered me quite helpless and prevented me from either moving a limb or uttering a sound. The creaks came nearer—down, down, down, until quite suddenly they stopped, and I heard a cough.

" It was repeated—cough, cough, cough. The cough of a delicate, neurotic woman. At first it simply startled me—it sounded so distinct, so reverberating, so real. Then it irritated me, and then it infuriated me—almost drove me mad. ' God take the woman,' I raved. ' Will she never cease.'

" Cough, cough, cough. A nervous, hacking cough, a worrying, grating cough, an intensely silly, murder-instilling cough. I could see the owner of it—upstairs, hidden from me by impenetrable darkness, and yet quite distinct—a slight, pale, excessively plain little woman, with watery eyes and a quivering mouth. Heavens, how the mouth maddened me ! On she went—cough, cough, cough ! She was still coughing, when I suddenly became aware of a presence close beside me, and I saw in the glow from the dying embers the figure of a man seated at a table in the middle of the kitchen. He appeared to be trying to write, but to be unable to collect his thoughts. Every now and then he paused, dashed his pen down, and clenched his fists furiously. At first I could not understand his behaviour, and then it all of a sudden

occurred to me—the coughing, of course. That perpetual noise, that everlasting hacking—it distracted, demented him. I watched him with feelings of infinite sympathy. At last, unable to stand it any longer, he sprang from his seat and dashed upstairs.

" I heard him race up two steps at a time. No madman would have raced faster or more nimbly. Then came a strange variety of sounds—a gratuitous course in phonetics—an altercation, more coughing, oaths, bumping, a scream, a thud, a little feeble cough, silence, and then rapidly descending footsteps—a man's footsteps. I did not wait for them. The spell that had hitherto held me limb-tied now abruptly left me, and I fled out of the building—home.

" The next day—Christmas Day—I made my report to the owner of the house, and told her exactly what had happened.

" ' Good heavens ! ' she exclaimed, ' and he's married Maisie ! Swear that you will never tell a soul, no one, not even your most intimate friend, and I will give you an explanation of what you witnessed.' (" All this happened years ago," Mr. Vandergooch remarked, " so it's all right my telling you now.") I promised, and she at once began.

" ' Ten years ago the occupants of the house you've been in were a well-known dramatist and his wife, whom I will call Mr. and Mrs. Charles Turner. Mrs. Turner was exactly like the woman you imagined—frail, small and very plain ; whilst her husband would tally with the man you saw in the kitchen—a tall, muscular, handsome man. He obviously married her for her money, poor soul, for there was nothing in her to attract him, and everyone could see how she irritated him, especially when she coughed—in fact, he often said to me, " You don't know, Mrs. Wehlen, how Eva annoys me. Whenever I am in the midst of my work, trying to concentrate my thoughts, she starts her infernal coughing—I can hear her all over the house—hack, hack, hack." ' She

can't help it, poor thing,' I replied. ' You ought to feel sorry for her.' ' Feel sorry for her,' he said. ' You'd feel sorry for her if you were tormented as I am. I believe she does it on purpose.'

" ' Well, one evening—to be precise, it was Christmas Eve—Mrs. Turner was found at the foot of the hall staircase with her neck broken. There was no direct evidence as to how she came there, but as one of the stair-rods was found loose, it was presumed that she fell over it, and, accordingly, a verdict of accidental death was returned. Charles Turner left the house directly afterwards, and a few months ago married my niece, Maisie. As far as I know, what you have seen has never been seen by anyone else, but coughing in the house has been heard, and it is quite plain to me now that Charles Turner murdered his first wife. I only pray to Heaven he won't serve Maisie the same.'

" But he did," Mr. Vandergooch added, " for she, too, was found at the foot of the staircase with her neck broken ! In all probability she had possessed some idiosyncrasy that worried and annoyed him ; or, possibly having once taken to murder, he felt he must go on with it—the habit of homicide being, no doubt, just as fascinating as the habit of drugs or of drink.

" Nothing, however, was proven, and, for all I know to the contrary, he may still be alive, still be killing people to appease his hyper-sensitive and outraged nerves."

This experience of Mr. Vandergooch made me think ; and eventually led to my devoting no small amount of attention to psychology and criminology. From what a variety of influences, it seemed to me, any one act might be induced, and to what innumerable and varied causes any one crime, for instance murder, might be traced. A minute bone pressing on a certain section of the brain, a stomach continually overladen with beefsteak and other animal food, over-excited nerves, the sight of some locality, such as a wood, an object, such as a knife, all

may lead to the same thing—the desire to kill; whilst, at the same time, the superphysical, through the agency of some evil spirit continually whispering to its selected victim the arrestive, the compelling thought, almost enforces any and every sort of crime. Seeing, then, that in every act of cruelty or violence it is more than likely that either one or other of these factors has been at work, is it fair that we should so readily condemn and therewith rest content?

True, it may be, and, I believe, it is expedient to punish the criminal, but surely it is even more urgent that we should make ourselves thoroughly acquainted with his case, so that we may if possible discover the factor that conduces to his crime, and then either destroy or counteract it.

From St. Louis I went to New York, where I lodged in a fifty cent. hotel in West Quay.

It was not a particularly elevating neighbourhood, but it was one that boasted of several haunted houses. I was taken to see one of them—a small store that supplied seamen's kits—by a fellow lodger, who, if I remember rightly, bore the name of Boxer. The proprietor of the store was a Swede; his name I cannot quite recall, it was, I believe, Jansen, or something like Jansen. He was at first extremely reticent, but on my assuring him that I was not in touch with any of the New York journals, and would not connive at his story getting into print, he agreed to tell me what had happened.

Calling his wife, a plain, stolid-looking woman, dressed in a neat and spotlessly clean print gown, he led the way upstairs to the top landing. There he stopped opposite a closed door, in front of which stood a large oak chest. "That's the room," he said; "we've barricaded it like that to prevent the children going in. When we first came here, my wife, and I, and our youngest child, Bertha, slept there. But we none of us liked the room, and we soon began to have very disturbed nights. I had ghastly nightmares, and so had my wife.

"And Bertha too," Mrs. Jansen chimed in; "she used to dread being left alone in the room even for five minutes, and used to cry till one or other of us went to her."

"That's right enough," Mr. Jansen interrupted; "and Bertha's never behaved like that since we moved her into another room."

"Well, we experienced nothing more disturbing than bad dreams for the first fortnight or so, and nothing happened until we were both aroused one night by hearing Bertha scream. We lit a candle and got out of bed. 'What is the matter,' I asked; 'are you in pain?' 'No, Poppa,' she said. 'Not in pain, but so frightened. I kept hearing the bed creak, and I thought one of you was coming out of it to kill me.'

"'Why, what nonsense,' I said. 'You've been dreaming again, child.' Then, turning to my wife, I remarked, 'If she has many more of these nightmares we had better send for the doctor. Don't you think so?' My wife made no answer, but suddenly gave a cry and pointed at the bed. 'Otto!' she cried. 'Look at the clothes! We never left them like that. What's happened to them?' I looked. The clothes were all heaped together down the centre of the bed exactly in the shape of a human body, with the face turned towards us.

"We all three stared at it in open-mouthed silence, and the longer we gazed, the more pronounced grew the features, until they at last became so lifelike, so evil, that my wife and I instinctively shrank back against the child's cot, and tried to hide the thing from her. My wife declares she saw it move."

"It did," Mrs. Jansen said. "I saw it distinctly shift nearer to us. So did Bertha."

"I know you were both agreed on that point," Mr. Jansen went on. "All I can say is I didn't see it do that, but I started praying, and whether it was the effect of my prayers or not, the clothes gradually became clothes again, and, after soothing Bertha, we scrambled

back into bed, feeling rather ashamed we had been so frightened.

" The following evening after Bertha had been put to bed, we heard her scream again, and we ran up and found her quivering under the bedclothes. She said our bed had begun rattling, just as if we were moving in it. On turning to examine it, we found the clothes just as we had seen them in the night, with one of the pillows pressed and moulded into the speaking likeness of a face.

" As I looked at it, the features became convulsed with such an indescribable expression of hellishness that I backed against the table and upset the light.

" On re-lighting it, the thing on the bed had disappeared, and the clothes were once again normal. That same night, some time after we were in bed, I awoke to find myself being roughly shaken by the shoulders. It was my wife, but, perhaps I had better let her go on with the story."

" I shook him," Mrs. Jansen explained, " because a feeling had suddenly come over me that I must kill Bertha. The very first night we slept in the room I became obsessed with a passionate desire to see someone die, a desire that I can assure you was absolutely novel to me, because I flatter myself I am naturally kind-hearted and extremely sensitive to seeing other people suffer."

" She's kindness itself," Mr. Jansen observed.

" Well," Mrs. Jansen went on, " the feeling became so unbearable, that fearing I should actually be compelled to kill someone, I awoke my husband and begged him to tie my hands together ; which, after some hesitation, he did. Bertha was crying bitterly, and told us she had again heard creaks in the room, just as if someone was getting out of bed to murder her. That was the last time we slept in the room. I felt it was a positive danger to spend another night in it, and so we removed into the one we are sleeping in now."

" And has it never been occupied since ? " I asked.

" Yes, for one night," Mrs. Jansen replied. " A niece of mine, Charlotte, came to stay with us, and as we had nowhere else to put her, she had to sleep there. We went to bed rather late that night, and I dreamed three times in succession that Charlotte was creeping down the stairs with some strange weapon in her hand, with which she intended killing Bertha. Bertha was then sleeping alone in the room facing ours.

" The third dream was so vivid that I awoke from it bathed with perspiration. I told my husband, and he said, ' Well, that's curious, for I thought I heard someone moving about overheard. I'll go and see if anything is amiss.' He opened the door, and, going on to the landing, discovered Charlotte tiptoeing cautiously down the stairs, holding a long, glittering pair of scissors in her hand, and with an expression on her face similar to that on the face in the bedclothes. ' What are you doing here ? ' my husband demanded, and Charlotte at once dropped the scissors and began crying. She told us that no sooner had she got into bed, than she felt like another person. It was just as if someone else's soul had crept into her body. All her old sentiments and ideals vanished, and the maddest and most unholy ideas presented themselves in rapid succession to her mind. A blind hatred of everyone in the house possessed her, and she was seized with the most ungovernable craving to kill. For a long time she fought against this mania, until at last, unable to restrain it any longer, she got out of bed and sought some weapon. Cold hands, she declared, seemed to guide her to the scissors, and armed with them, she crept downstairs, just as I had seen her in my sleep, determined to butcher Bertha first, and then, if possible, my husband and myself.

" She pleaded our forgiveness and begged to be allowed to go home first thing in the morning. ' I do not feel I am responsible for my behaviour,' she said. ' I never had the slightest inclination to do anything of the sort before. I am sure it's that room. There's some

sinister influence in it, and if I go back to it, I'm certain I shall do something dreadful.'

"She spent the rest of the night on the sofa in the parlour, and shortly before noon returned to her parents.

"After that we locked up the room and had this chest placed against the door, as you now see it."

"Do you know the history of the house?" I asked.

"Only that before we came here," Mrs. Jansen said, "there were several sudden deaths. I do not think any of them were actually attributed to murder, though they were all due to rather extraordinary accidents. Originally, I believe, the house was an inn, kept by a woman who bore a very evil reputation, and we have always wondered if the hauntings had anything to do with her."

"I suppose you couldn't tell whether the face formed by the bedclothes was a man or a woman's?" I remarked.

"Not, perhaps, by the actual features," she responded, "only by the expression. I can't explain how, but it was an expression which at once explained to me its sex, and that sex was not masculine."

As I have said, this was not the only case of haunting in West Quay that I heard of during this visit of mine to New York, but it is the only one of sufficient interest to note here. Two equally interesting cases, perhaps, came my way when I was travelling West. The one was in Boston, the other in Chicago. I will deal with the Chicago one first:—

A banker in Chicago, to whom I had a letter of introduction, hearing that I was interested in ghosts, showed me a house close to Michigan Avenue where he had had a somewhat novel experience.

"Some years ago," he said, "that house had the reputation for being very badly haunted, and not by one ghost, but by dozens. It was then occupied by an eccentric old millionaire, whom I will call Mr. Hoonigan. Mr. Hoonigan had a very curious hobby. In a room, which he

named Duckdom, he had a collection of the most exquisitely wrought models of women, clad in costumes which must surely have cost thousands of pounds. They were all made in Paris, and many of them had once stood in windows in the Rue de Rivoli. I have never seen anything to equal them; their eyes, hair, and finger nails were not only beautifully coloured and moulded, they were most natural and life-like. Mr. Hoonigan worshipped them. He used to spend hours a day sitting before each of them in turn, fondling their hands and making love to them in the most exaggerated fashion. Mad! Yes, of course, he was mad; but his madness did not always take such a harmless form. In a room opposite Duckdom, which he named Devildom, he had collected the models—some fifty or more—of murderers, and other criminals of the lowest type, besides a heterogeneous assortment of the most revolting objects. Amongst these objects were images of the South Sea Islands and Mexican gods; figures in wood and stone, representing ghosts and demons; cases full of mummies and skeletons; weapons that had once belonged to murderers and still bore traces of their victims' blood; scalping and flaying knives; and a variety of ancient instruments of torture; whilst to accentuate the horror of the room as a whole, paintings such as only a brain in the most advanced stage of morbid disease could have conceived covered the walls. Mr. Hoonigan did not make a practice of showing his collections promiscuously, he was far too jealous of them, and I do not suppose there were ten people in Chicago who knew of their existence. Indeed, it was only with the very greatest difficulty that I got his permission to view them. He allowed no servants to sleep in the house, and when I went there one evening to see his treasures, he opened the door to me himself. 'Do you see this?' he cackled, pointing to the brown muzzle of a revolver, which showed itself from under his coat. 'Well, I have two more of them, and the house is full of pitfalls, all admirable inventions of my

own, and warranted to upset the calculations of even the most experienced cracksman.' 'Have you ever been troubled by burglars?' I asked, glancing over the shoulders of the queer old figure before me, and letting my eyes wander round the great hall, dimly lighted and full of many suggestive nooks. 'Yes, several times,' he said, 'and once, one actually got in. He is here now.' 'Here now!' I cried. 'Why, you surely don't mean to say that you've reformed him and kept him as your servant?'

"Mr. Hoonigan chuckled, and his yellow fangs reminded me unpleasantly of the blunt and rusty teeth of a saw. 'Not exactly,' he said. 'He fell into one of my traps. You will see him later in my little chamber of horrors. He's been there ever since.' (This seemed a trifle indiscreet; but Mr. Hoonigan knew he could trust me. You see, I was his banker, and business means business in Chicago.)

"'But come,' he continued, 'I will show you Duckdom first, because you will then the better appreciate its opposite. There is nothing like contrasts to teach you true enjoyment.' He stepped into an elevator, and we went up, passing storey after storey, all dark, silent and deserted. At last we stopped, and getting out, entered a brilliantly illuminated room. 'Here they are!' Mr. Hoonigan exclaimed. 'Let me introduce you to my fair women friends.' I looked round, and there before me was a vast assemblage of women, all of them richly dressed in the very latest fashion. All beautiful, however, and all most artistically posed; some sitting, some standing, some lying at full length on rugs and sofas. They were so absolutely natural that it took me some seconds to realise they were only models—models in wax. Mr. Hoonigan approached one, and taking its hand, pressed it reverently. 'When I die,' he said, 'I shall be placed here, and the room shall be hermetically sealed. I want no other heaven.' He then took me across the landing to another room. I had been prepared

for a shock, but not for the kind of shock I got when the door opened, and a hell, seething with devilry—ten thousand times more devilish than the devilry of Dante's Hell—was suddenly thrust under my very nose. I recoiled, and Mr. Hoonigan, perceiving my fright, playfully pushed me in. When we were well in the midst of them, he pointed with great glee to several of the most notorious murderers, and insisted upon my picking up and examining their weapons. He then made me sit on a garotting chair, which he had quite recently purchased in Cuba, and when I was thus seated, he thrust a skull on my knee, which he said was that of a Red Indian Chief, who had for certain skinned alive with his own hands a whole family of whites.

" By this time, as you may think, I had had enough of it, but, as Mr. Hoonigan truly remarked, there was so much to be seen ; besides, he must, he said, whilst I was there, show me a stock of engravings which he had just bought in Madrid. They dated from the reign of Philip II., and represented, in grim detail, all the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition. But this was not all. Their chief interest, according to Mr. Hoonigan, lay in the fact that the inquisitors—to quote Mr. Hoonigan's own words—' just as an appetiser—an hors d'œuvre, don't you know,' used to give them to their victims to examine before they commenced to torture them.

" At the conclusion of this exhibition I managed somehow to get away, and was walking to the elevator, when I saw something slink past us. I turned round, and in the gloom could only see, indistinctly, the form of a man of medium height, with a thick-set, brutal figure, and ambling gait. I could not see his face. He seemed to walk right through the door, which was shut, into the room we had just vacated. ' What is it ? ' Mr. Hoonigan asked. Somewhat nervously, I told him. ' Ah,' he said, ' that's only one of them, and one of the least terrifying. You didn't know, I suppose, that the house is haunted. From your description I should say that what you have

just seen is the ghost of the burglar I told you about. But there are other ghosts—if you like to term them so—that are most troublesome. I have had to give up sleeping on this landing. I sleep on the ground floor now, with the electric light full on, all night.' "

The case of the Boston ghost came to my notice in a very direct fashion. I only stayed in the town two nights, and chance led me to put up in an hotel which I learned bore an undeniable reputation for being haunted. It was in rather a poor neighbourhood—at least poor for Boston—and there were few visitors; indeed, on the landing where I slept, no one. I spent all my first day in the town sight-seeing and visiting relatives whom I had never met before, and I did not get back to the hotel till very late. The place was dimly lit and oppressively silent.

"Am I the last in?" I asked the night porter, who rubbed his eyes wearily and yawned.

"Yes, sir," he said; "the other guests have been gone to bed two hours or more. It's close on one."

"What part of Ireland do you come from?" I enquired.

"County Limerick, to be sure," he said; "but you couldn't tell I was Irish!"

"At once," I said. "What were you over there?"

"I was working on the roads," he said, "and before that I was in the Army—in the Inniskillings."

"What date?" I enquired.

He told me, and it then transpired that he had enlisted in that regiment when one of my uncles was a major in it, and he remembered him well. We were thus talking away and recalling episodes of the long past, when I heard a familiar sliding kind of noise, and broke off in the middle of a sentence.

"Surely, that's the elevator," I exclaimed. "I hope our talking has not disturbed anyone."

"I don't think so, sir," he said. "At any rate, I shouldn't trouble myself about it." His voice sounded so

"But there are other Ghosts—if you like to term them so—
that are more troublesome"

strange, I thought, and there was such an odd, furtive look in his eyes, that I became curious, and walking across the hall, arrived on the other side, just in time to see the elevator come slowly and softly down.

To my astonishment there was no one in it.

"How's that happened?" I remarked. "No one called it, and had they done so we must have seen them."

"I can't say, sir," the porter replied, looking very uneasy.

"Well, it's certainly rather odd," I ejaculated. "Anyhow, it's chosen to come down at a very convenient moment." And, getting in, I went up.

The following night I returned late, and entered the vestibule of the hotel just as the elevator stopped.

"Does it come down at the same time every night?" I asked the porter.

"Yes, sir," he muttered, "every night."

"And the reason?—there must, of course, be some reason. An elevator can't start off unless someone or something starts it." He was silent. "I see there's some mystery attached to it," I persisted. "What is it? Tell me." He remained obdurate for some seconds, but eventually succumbed.

"For goodness sake, don't let on, sir," he said, "because the boss has forbidden any of the staff to mention it, and if he found out I'd told you, he'd sack me at once. This hotel is haunted. Several years ago, before my time, a visitor arrived here late one night and was found by the day porter dead in the lift. How he died was never exactly known; it was rumoured he had either committed suicide or been murdered. It was never found out who he was or where he came from, and, as he had no money on him, he was buried like a pauper. Well, sir, ever since then that elevator has taken it into its head to set itself in motion at the same time every night. Sometimes the gates clang just as if someone were getting in and out. At first I usedn't to like it at all. You can imagine, perhaps, what it's like to know that you are the

only person about in a place of this sort—and then to hear the elevator suddenly beginning to descend. However, by degrees, I got accustomed to it, and if that was all that happened, I shouldn't mind."

"What else does happen?" I asked.

"I can't tell you, sir. Would you like a bit of exercise?"

"I don't mind," I said. "Why?"

"Will you try the staircase, then, instead of the elevator? Count the stairs and note carefully when you come to the forty-first."

I agreed. The stairs were narrow and tortuous, the light meagre, and soon I began to feel very, very far from my friend the porter, and very much alone in the building. This feeling increased the further I proceeded, until, at last, it became so unbearable that I involuntarily halted. I had conscientiously counted the steps. I was at the thirty-ninth. I looked around me. High over head was a kind of funnel formed of black, funereal, and apparently never-ending banisters; below me was a similarly constructed pit. The flickering gas-light brought into play innumerable shadows. I tried to look away from them, for their gambols were unpleasantly emphasized by the ominously oppressive silence, but they fascinated me to such an extent that I was forced to watch them, and, whilst I was thus engaged, I became suddenly aware of a presence. Something I could not see was standing on the staircase, a few steps ahead, barring my way. I advanced one step, and with a tremendous effort I struggled on to the next one. Then the most frightful, the most overwhelming, diabolical terror seized me, and turning round, I tore downstairs.

"Well," the door porter said, "you've come back. Couldn't pass it. No one who tries to do so at this time of night ever can."

"What is it?" I gasped. "What is the beastly thing?"

" I don't know," he replied ; " no one knows. This place was once a madhouse, I believe, and perhaps——"

" Ah, well," I said, " I can understand it now. Thank goodness I'm leaving to-morrow, and as it's a choice of two evils, I'll go up in the lift."

CHAPTER VII

A HAUNTED WOOD AND A HAUNTED QUARRY IN CANADA

ALL my ghostly experiences in the United States were of indoor hauntings, consisting mostly of the visitation of phantasms of the dead, who in earthly form had either suffered or committed some deed of violence. I never met with a psychic experience out-of-doors, though I only too well realised the possibilities of such when I was sleeping by myself on the ranche in Oregon, or riding alone through the giant forests of the Cascades mountains.

I believe all the loneliest parts of America, the great, bold Rockies, the vast Californian and Oregon forests are periodically visited by ghosts—ghosts of murdered soldiers, of scalp-raising Indians, fo tramp suicides—of all manner of evilly-disposed white and red people, and of neutrarians, spirits that have never inhabited earthly bodies, and which are as grotesque and awe-inspiring as the fantastically carved boulders and queerly shaped tree trunks with which those parts are so lavishly bestrewn.

America, indeed, affords one of the wildest fields in the world for the genuine ghost hunter. I use the word genuine advisedly, for I would differentiate between the ghost hunter who is genuine, and the professor of physics, who expects the Unknown to be subservient to his beck and call. I say, then, for the ghost hunter with a kindly,

sympathetic nature, the ghost hunter whose thoughts are more often on the spiritual than the material plane, and who would earnestly seek the chance to succour and comfort a lost soul, the United States of America gives the greatest scope.

From what I have heard, for I have never been there, Canada also is a much haunted country. An account of a haunting there was given me by a French Canadian, Bertram Armand, whom I met with his wife one day at an hotel in New York. Though born and educated in Canada, he had served in the French Army, and had spent a considerable portion of his life in France and Algiers. He had now retired, and it was on the occasion of his quittal of the Army and return to Canada that the event I am about to narrate, and which I give as nearly as possible in his own words, occurred :—

" My home," he began, " was in a small town called Garvois,* to the South-West of Winnipeg, which, at the time of my adventure, some ten or twelve years ago, was nothing like the size it is now.

" I had got out of the train at Winnipeg, and dined at an hotel, and the evening was well set in before I rose from my comfortable seat before the fire and prepared for my long tramp.

" ' If you take my advice, sir,' the landlord said, ' you will avoid the wood of Garvois after dark.' ' And why, pray ? ' I asked. ' Because, sir,' he responded, ' because it bears an evil reputation.'

" ' An evil reputation ! ' I laughed. ' Ma foi ! it must bear a very evil reputation, a positively devilish reputation, to frighten an old soldier like me. Why, man alive, I have served in the French Army in the wildest regions of Algiers for years. A wood with an evil reputation, mille tonnerres,—that's a joke I shan't forget in a hurry.' Then seeing him look glum, I remarked, for I had no wish to hurt his feelings, ' I can appreciate your intended kind-

* I am not sure of the proper spelling of the word, as the writing in my original notes has become so very illegible in places.

ness, but you see I have been away from home for ten years—ten whole years, and I am dying to see my father. He is the only relative I have—therefore you can gather that I want to go by the quickest route, and the road through the wood, if I remember rightly, is twice as short as that by the plain. Is it not so ?'

" The landlord shrugged his shoulders. ' Yes,' he said, ' the road over the plain is longer—certainly it is longer—and if you go by it you won't arrive at your father's house till morning, but, monsieur, if you go by the wood you may never reach home at all.'

" ' I will risk it,' I laughed ; ' there can only be robbers or wolves, and I am prepared for either. I have these ! ' And I tapped the ends of two six-shooters. ' At all events, if anything happens, I will haunt the wood, and you may come and see me. Au revoir ! ' I waved my hand as I spoke, and putting my pack in the proper place on my back, I stepped airily on to the broad, brown track leading to Garvois.

" Within an hour of my departure, the weather, which had been abominably cloudy for the time of the year, took a sudden turn for the worse, and the rain descended in torrents. I chuckled grimly, Mr. O'Donnell, for what after all are the discomforts of sodden clothes and squishy boots compared with what a soldier has to undergo in Africa—in the Sahara, where the sun is hell and the insects—devils. Rain, Mon Dieu ! What's rain ! On and on I tramped, whistling gaily and running my hand over my pack now and again to see that everything was safe. I had a present there for my father, whom I loved more than anyone else in the world. ' You see,' he added with a smile, ' I hadn't met Jacqueline then.'

" Well, so long as I kept to the main track there was not much to complain about—it had recently been attended to, but the moment I turned off it, and on to the side one leading to the wood, my troubles began. Deep ruts, big holes, huge earth mounds, and sharp-edged stones made it bad enough in dry weather ; it was now a

quagmire—a quagmire that afforded every possibility of soon becoming dangerous.

"I had seen nothing like it since I was in Algiers, but, bah! a soldier can get used to anything. 'It is a mere nothing,' I said to myself. 'I can dive, I can swim; it will take more than cold water to kill me; and if it were twenty times as bad I would face it.' Ten years is a long time to be away from one's home, Mr. O'Donnell. I trudged on, and was soon ankle-deep in black mud. At eight o'clock I was confronted by a long line of huge, black trees, that bent their dripping tops as if they had orders to salute me. Coming to a halt, and leaning against a slender, isolated pine, that creaked and groaned in the rough night air, I ruefully surveyed the prospect in front of me. The track through the wood was twelve miles—nothing of a walk if I had been fresh and the weather dry, but in my present condition a seemingly impossible one. For the last hour or so I had experienced nothing but a recurrence of slips and falls, I had done nothing but plunge in and out of abysses, and I had been completely battered to pieces by the wind. And the rain! I can stand any amount of heat, Mr. O'Donnell, but wet, no, it gets into every pore of my skin and completely demoralises me. I was exhausted, almost at the end of my tether, and I felt a very little more would see me on the ground, absolutely done. Now, of course, I am used to sleeping out of doors all night; but, then, Canada is not France, neither is it Africa, and the warmth and dryness of the Sahara had made me terribly susceptible to chills. A night in this wood would mean for certain either pneumonia or rheumatic fever—and I might never get home to see my father. So what alternative was there? Only to tramp back again over that dreadful track, and take the long route over the plains. I couldn't do it; I hadn't the strength. I would struggle on. I did so—I took the plunge. The desert, with the lights twinkling far away on

its extremities, was speedily hidden from view; trees shut me in on all sides; I was at last in the forest. I had never known what it was to be nervous, but the silence I now experienced disquieted me. I had never felt anything like it. It struck me as an assumed silence—assumed purposely to cloak a deep-rooted and universal resentment. Moreover, I had an uncomfortable suspicion that it was the prelude to something hostile—to some peculiar antagonistic demonstration, the very nature of which was at present enigmatical. It was a silence savouring of a world other than ours—of a world I knew nothing about—indeed, at that period of my life I was an atheist, and neither believed in a God or a future existence. The rain pattered heavily on the foliage overhead, and the wind groaned, but the voices—the voices of the beings in this Unknown World—were still, absolutely still. In the gloom the trees assumed strange shapes; their motions, too, were strange—so strange that I did not think they could possibly have been caused by the wind. You may think I am hyper-imaginative, Mr. O'Donnell, but I do not think I am; my wife would tell me if I were, for she has never been slow in pointing out my faults, have you, Jacqueline?"

Mrs. Armand smiled. "No, Mr. O'Donnell," she said, "he has many faults, but exaggeration is not one of them; indeed, he is so precise as to be sometimes dull."

Mr. Armand continued: "I saw lights, too, Mr. O'Donnell," he said; "all kinds of coloured lights, which I did not then attribute to possible spirit agency. I simply did not know what they were. I was not afraid, but I became wary, and moved furtively forward, as if I had been scouting in some enemy's country. Every now and then I fancied I heard soft steps that I could associate with nothing human, stealing surreptitiously behind me. I paused and looked carefully over my shoulder, but there was nothing visible—only the gloom. At length the darkness became so intense that I could no longer see the

track. I continued to advance, however, and after plunging through a succession of bogs and briars was finally brought to a peremptory halt by a stone wall. This wall was four feet or so in height, but what lay on the other side of it, or where indeed it began or ended, it was impossible to decide, and I was wondering what on earth I had better do next—for my energy was nearly spent—when a voice suddenly called out, ' Keep along by the wall and I will meet you at the wicket gate ! ' Over joyed, I obeyed. The wall swerved sharply round, and a few yards beyond, with one hand on the gate and in the other a dark lantern, stood the slight, muffled-up figure of a woman. In a few words I explained the situation—how in the blinding rain and darkness of the forest I had lost my way, and was too exhausted to go any further. ' I don't mind sleeping anywhere,' I pleaded, ' so long as I can lie where it is dry and rest till morning. An attic, barn, anything will do.'

" ' I think I can offer you something better than that,' the woman responded, as she led me through the gate and along a narrow winding path to a large, low, rakish-looking house, whose black walls, rising suddenly out of the ground before me, seemed startlingly familiar. My guide halted—a key turned, a door flew open—there was a rush of strange, musty air, and almost before I had time to realise it, I was inside the building. ' I must apologise for the absence of light,' the woman said, ' but under the circumstances the omission is unavoidable. If we had been expecting you,it would, of course, have been different. If you will follow me, I will take you to your room.' I tried to see her face, to make out what she was like, but I was frustrated in my desire by the way in which she held the lantern. Nor was I any more fortunate in the discernment of my surroundings ; I could see the ground at my feet, but no more ; all—everything —was shrouded in an impenetrable, sable mantle. The curious feeling that I had been there before, that I knew

the house well, again came over me, although prior to now I had never seen any habitation in the wood, nor even known that one existed. I argued it was probably a scent—some peculiar odour in the atmosphere that had conjured back memories of some other and quite distinct place; but I had not much time for speculation, as the woman's movements were very quick, and I had barely scraped the thickest of the mud from off my feet before she had begun to ascend a luxuriously-carpetted staircase. We crossed what I took to be a landing, and stepped some score or so paces down a corridor, finally halting before a half-open doorway.

"'There is your room,' she said. 'You need have no fear—the linen is well aired, and of course,' she added, slightly sniffing, 'you may, if you like, open the windows. We have been obliged to keep them closed, owing to the damp. Good-night!'

"She turned to go, and just for the fraction of a second I saw her face. It was exquisite. My wife will pardon me for saying my wildest dreams of woman's beauty were not merely rivalled, they were surpassed. I doubt even if so great a painter of feminine charms as Richter could have done her credit. Who was she? I kept asking myself that question long after she had left me, and the echoes of her high-heeled shoes along the passage and down the stairs had ceased. Who was she? Ma foi! The vision of such loveliness would never leave me. I would enjoy them over and over again in my sleep. Indeed, I was so obsessed with her face that I paid little or no heed to the novelty of the situation. At other times I might have queried the desirability of being in a strange bedroom in a strange house—in the dark. But the knowledge she was near at hand was quite enough for me. I was already in love with her—and the queerest, the most perplexing of predicaments were as nothing to me. I soared above—God alone knew how high above—dilemmas. Still, when I came to argue it out with myself,

it was a bit of a nuisance my matches were sodden and I could not use them. I would have preferred seeing the bed upon which I was to lie, and a spot where I could lay my clothes. I was so afraid of soiling the upholstery that I undressed where I stood, and then, making a guess at the direction of the bed, walked cautiously forward. By a piece of luck, which struck me as somewhat extraordinary, I collided with the bedstead—a large brass one —almost immediately.

" It was the work of a second to throw back the sheets and scramble in between them, and then, with my mind full to overflowing with visions of my newly-found goddess, I entrusted both her and my father to the safe keeping of the Virgin and the Saints—this though I had no faith in a future for myself—and sank into a deep refreshing sleep.

" How long I remained in that condition I never knew. I woke with a start to find the room no longer dark, but partially illuminated with a fitful red glow which proceeded from the stove, now full of lurid logs. Thinking I must be dreaming, I rubbed my eyes. But no ; the fire was still there, and even as I gazed at it I caught the sound of approaching footsteps—the sharp rat-tat of high-heeled shoes. Nearer and nearer they came, right up to the entrance of my room, when, to my astonishment and no little embarrassment, the door gently opened, and in tip-toed the object of my admiration. In one hand she carried a long-handled iron spoon, and in the other a candle. I was entranced. Now that she had taken off her hood and cloak, beauties hitherto concealed stood out in dazzling fulness and bewitched me. Never had I seen such a wealth of rich golden hair, such a perfect nose and chin, such tiny ears, carmine lips, white teeth, black-lashed, china-blue eyes, white tapering fingers, rosy, almond-shaped nails, and such a heavenly figure. My wife, Mr. O'Donnell, bears me no animosity. You don't, do you, Jacqueline ? "

"No, no," Mrs. Armand laughed. "I understand you. All men are the same. Go on and tell Mr. O'Donnell more about your goddess."

"You are right," Bertram Armand exclaimed. "She was a goddess—at least my idea of one, then. What did she want? I sat up in bed, and was about to speak to her, when she laid a finger on her lips and smilingly bade me be silent. She then glided to the grate, and taking from her pocket a small lump of lead, carefully put it into the spoon, which she balanced with the utmost care on the brightest of the faggots. That done, she again smiled meaningly at me, and walking to the dainty dressing-table, strewn profusely with rings and bracelets, looked long and critically at herself in the mirror. It was while she was thus occupied that I suddenly became conscious of something or someone close to me. In a moment my heart ceased to beat; in deadly fear I glanced round, and perceived, lying by my side, an old man with long, grizzled hair and beard, whose features were somehow vaguely familiar to me. He was sound asleep—a fact betrayed by his breathing, which was loud and stertorious. A slight movement from the other part of the room attracting my attention, I looked up, just in time to see the girl flash me a look of subtle warning.

"'Don't wake him, whatever you do,' her eyes said; 'he *must* sleep on.'

"'Don't wake him,' I repeated to myself; 'why, of course I won't. I wouldn't do anything—no matter what—if you told me not to; I would obey you even at the risk of life and soul!' Dieu en ciel! How lovely!

"Cautiously—first one daintily clad foot and then the other—the girl approached the stove. She lifted the spoon carefully from the fire, bore it steadily before her to the bed, and gaily motioning to me to keep quiet, she gently turned the sleeper's head over on the pillow, and with a dexterous movement of her clever, supple fingers, poured the seething, hissing lead into his ear. There was

"I looked up, just in time to see the girl flash me a look of subtle warning"

an agonising scream—the eyes of the old man opened convulsively, and in the brief glimpse I caught of them, I recognised my father.

"Almost simultaneously came a loud crash, blinding darkness, and I was once again in the forest—God knows how—pursuing my way laboriously along the mud-laden track.

"At early dawn I arrived within sight of Garvois—Garvois bathed in a cold grey mist, and a little later I dragged myself with difficulty towards the wicket gate leading to my father's house. To my intense surprise it was padlocked, but the mystery explained itself at once—standing upright in the garden was a notice-board, bearing the inscription, 'To be Let or Sold.' I swayed on my feet as I looked at it, and with a bursting heart reeled away to the nearest house—the house of my old friend, Henry Crozier.

"Henry had just awakened—he invariably got up at five—and shuffling downstairs, he opened the door.

"'Le diable!' he exclaimed, 'if it isn't Bertram! Ma foi! I was dreaming of you last night. So you've come back!'

"'Come back to find the place empty!' I murmured. 'But, tell me, my friend, where's my father?'

"Henry's eyes grew round with astonishment. 'What!' he said. 'What! you don't know?' Then, seeing my look of utter stupefaction, he added: 'My poor Bertram! Your father is dead! He died a fortnight ago, the very day after his marriage with Mademoiselle Marie Dernille, the niece of his last housekeeper. What killed him? Apoplexy. It does not do to dispute the doctor.'

"'But the woman—the woman? What was she like?' I stuttered.

"'Why,' Harry enunciated slowly, 'she was what some people would call beautiful, though, as God is my judge, I did not admire her. Fair, very fair, a mass of

washed-out yellow hair, painted lips—oh, yes, anyone could see they were painted—and big, very big eyes—china-blue and smiling—name of a name—eternally smiling.' "

. . . . . .

This was Bertram Armand's account of his experience. In answer to my questions he told me that he had searched the wood thoroughly, but there was no house of any sort in it, and afterwards, having had his father's body secretly exhumed, and finding lead in the ear, he had obtained an order for the arrest of his step-mother. She was, however, nowhere to be found, and he supposed that, having got wind of the affair, she had escaped out of the country.

Armand told his story with every appearance of sincerity, and as I could see that his wife believed it, I have no doubt at all that it was true.

. . . . . .

The case of another haunting in Canada was told me on my way out to the States, on board one of the White Star Liners.

My place at table was next to a Doctor and Mrs. Fanshawe, both Canadians, who, hearing that I was interested in everything connected with the super-physical, told me that they had had several rather curious experiences. The doctor took from his breast-pocket a small leather purse, and, opening it, showed me a dull, blue stone.

" Are you a geologist ? " he asked.

" No," I replied. " I know nothing whatever about stones. What is it ? "

" No one has ever been able to tell me," he said. " I have shown it to several Professors at the English Universities and they have each classified it differently. Not one of them, I believe, had ever seen or even heard of a stone like it. And for a very simple reason. In Canada there is much soil that has never been disturbed, and many tracts of land no white man has ever trod.

"But let me explain how the stone came into my possession. Five years ago we took a house situated about four or five miles from Montreal. It was a long, low, two storey house, standing a little back from the road, and connected with it by a semi-circular sweep of gravel road. Opposite the house was a large pit, where quarrying had recently been begun, but had been discontinued, owing to the calcinous nature of the rock, which rendered it of little use for building purposes. Incessant rains had formed a deep pool in the bottom of the pit, and the water possessed this idiosyncrasy—the weather made no difference to its temperature—it was icy cold in summer and winter alike.

"Viewed in the day-time, the quarry struck one as ordinary enough. It was at dusk, when the shadows from the trees and bushes swept across the road and dimmed the mouth of the great pit, that it impressed one as unsavoury. I remember marvelling at this metamorphosis the first day of our arrival. It was July, and the landscape was vividly aglow with brilliant, scintillating sunbeams. A more radiant scene you could not imagine. 'One might make a capital swimming bath of this,' I remarked to my wife, as we wandered to the edge of the pit and peered down into the silent, sparkling water.

"'Yes,' she laughed. 'Supposing we start right away. I never appreciate a bath more than after a journey.'

"That was in the morning. In the evening the place produced a very different impression. We had dinner—the sort of scratch meal one must expect when one is 'moving in,' and I had strolled out alone. I first of all explored the premises. There was a big garden with an orchard alongside, and a small field beyond; and I pictured to myself how nice it would all look when the grass was properly cut and the flower-beds planted by my wife, who, by the way, thoroughly understands landscape gardening. You do, don't you, Mabel?"

Mrs. Fanshawe nodded, and her husband resumed his story.

"I lit another cigar and walked out into the road to have a look at the quarry. I hardly recognised it. It seemed, since the morning, to have undergone a complete change. The banks appeared higher and more precipitous, the water blacker and infinitely deeper, and there was a cold dreariness about the place that made me shiver. I thought I had never viewed anything so utterly forlorn and murderous. On the opposite bank were a few rank sedges and several white trunks of decayed trees. I had not noticed them before, but now, as I gazed down at the pool, I saw their re-modelled and inverted images outlined with a clearness that more than rivalled that of their material counterparts.

"I was pondering over this phenomenon, when I suddenly felt I was being watched, and, raising my eyes, I perceived on the bank facing me, just out of reach of the water, a boulder of ebony-black and grotesquely-wrought rock. I could not see anything behind it, but I was convinced that something was there, something that was crouching on its haunches and glaring savagely at me. I also felt convinced that this thing, which I could not actually see—though I knew for certain it was there—was some strange hybrid of a man and animal; a thing with limbs like ours, but the face of some fantastic, mocking, malevolent beast.

"Filled with a great uneasiness and all manner of vague fears, I hurried back to the house, where all was bright and cheerful, but I could not rid my mind of the impression it had taken from the pool, and that night my dreams were troubled and alarming.

"I said nothing about it to my wife, but two days later, when I was mending my fishing-rod in the study, she came to me in a great state of agitation. 'Why, what's the matter, Mabel?' I asked anxiously; 'you look very white! Are you ill?' 'No,' she said. 'I've only had a shock.'"

At the doctor's request, Mrs. Fanshawe then took up the thread.

"I was walking down one of the side-paths of the garden," she said, "looking for Ephraim (Ephraim was our gardener), when I heard a great rustling of leaves. I turned round and saw a violent agitation going on in the branches of an apple-tree. Much mystified, as I could see no cause for it, I approached nearer, and as I did so I distinctly heard some heavy body drop to the earth with a thud; I then felt something brush past me. I can't exactly describe the sensation it caused, because it is beyond words. I can only say I felt I was being touched by something immeasurably foul and antagonistic. I reeled right back, and that moment someone spoke. It was the gardener who came running towards me to ask if he could go home, as his wife had suddenly been taken ill."

"That was all that happned, then?"

"No," Mrs. Fanshawe replied. "That night, after we had been in bed some time, we were awakened by hearing our Newfoundland dog, Pat, bark. I went downstairs to see what was the matter with him—he slept in the house—and found him standing in the hall with his hair all erect, looking at the window by the front door.

"I called to my husband, and he came down with his revolver. We then both went to the window and looked out, but could see no one. 'I'm sure Pat sees something,' I observed; 'he is beside himself with terror.' 'What is it, Pat?' Dick said, and was about to stroke him, when there came a violent hammering at the door. We looked at one another in dismay. 'Who's there?' Dick cried, and, there being no reply, he fired—the bullet going right through the door. We threw it open—there was no one there. We then searched the garden (nothing would persuade Pat to accompany us), but we found no one.

"For a week after this incident we were undisturbed; then all sorts of noises were heard in the house—soft footsteps, heavy breathing, the rattling of door handles,

and—most alarming of all—loud crashes on the door panels. The servants were terrified. One of them roused us one night by loud shrieks, and going to her room, we found her in hysterics. All the clothes had been stripped off her bed and thrown in a promiscuous heap on the floor. When she recovered sufficiently to speak, she told us something had come into her room and tried to suffocate her—she felt just as if all the breath in her body was being forcibly sucked out of her. She had seen nothing. We told her it was a nightmare, and tried to soothe her, but our endeavours met with little success, and in the morning she was seriously ill. She died within a fortnight, and on the same day as the gardener's wife."

"Did the gardener's wife live on the premises, too?" I asked.

"Practically," Mrs. Fanshawe replied. "She and her husband occupied a cottage close to."

"Did both women usually have good health?"

"Rather," Dr. Fanshawe laughed; "they were as tough as horses—rosy-cheeked, strong-limbed, typical young Canadians. Heart and lungs absolutely sound. I diagnosed their cases and was much puzzled. On the top of violent shocks, which had apparently upset their whole constitution, they had developed acute anæmia. Why do you ask?"

"Merely because of an idea," I replied; "but pray let Mrs. Fanshawe finish her story, and then, if you like, I will tell you what my idea is."

"Well," Mrs. Fanshawe continued, "I haven't much more to relate. On the night after our maid's funeral, we were again disturbed by Pat barking. I got up and went to the bedroom window. The weather was very unsettled. Clouds scurried across the moon, that hung like a great silver ball over the St. Lawrence River, which I could see winding its mighty course in the distance; spots of heavy rain were falling, and the wind whistled dolefully through the leaves of the maples.

"Suddenly I heard the sound of heavy footsteps

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"The Thing came right up to the window, and then raised its face"

crunching their way along the gravel drive. 'It will be nothing visible,' I said to myself, and then I got a pretty acute shock. Coming towards the house with short, quick steps was a tall figure, with its head bowed low. Its arms and legs were very long and bony, the feet and hands enormous. It was quite nude, and from all over its body, which was of an exaggerated whiteness, there emanated a strange, phosphorescent glow. I called to Dick, and he at once joined me. The Thing came right up to the window, and then raised its face. If I live to be a thousand years old I shall never forget what I saw. The proportion of the face was not human, and it was partially covered with hair, but the eyes were the same shape as ours, only very much bigger. They were pale, almost white, I thought, and their expression——"

"Don't talk of it," Dr. Fanshawe interrupted. "One can only say it was too damnable, too utterly vicious and loathsome for words."

"We were so overcome," his wife went on, "that for some seconds neither of us could articulate a syllable. We both stared at it in hideous fascination. At last it made some slight movement, and Dick, released from the spell that held him, fired at it. The bullet must have gone right through it, for we saw the gravel on the path immediately behind it spurt up and scatter. However, the figure was unharmed, and it moved on towards the front door. Dick fired again, but with no better result. A fearful horror now seized us, lest it should get into the house. I am not a religious woman, but I prayed, and as I did so I saw Dick throw something. What he threw seemed to strike the thing full in the face, and it vanished. As we got back into bed, I said to Dick, 'That was very odd! What did you throw?'"

"'A stone I picked up near the quarry this morning,' he replied. 'I don't know why I threw it, but directly you started praying, a feeling came over me that I must.'

"We were not disturbed again that night, but slept better than we had done for some time, and in the

morning Dick found and showed me the stone—the stone you are looking at now. We had it fixed to the front door, and after that we were not troubled again."

"There was no history attached to the place," Dr. Fanshawe added, "and no one we spoke to had ever heard of its being haunted. Now, what do you make of it?"

"A fairly satisfactory case," I replied, "because I think this stone affords a clue to part of the mystery at least. When I was out in the West, I was told by some Indians of the Rogue River tribe, whom I was delighted to fall in with, that when a place of theirs was haunted, they kept the ghost quiet by burying a piece of blue rock, which is to be found in the lava beds of that district, but is very rare. Now in all probability this custom is not confined to the Indians of one tribe, but is more or less universal; therefore we need not be surprised to find a piece of this blue rock buried elsewhere."

"But there are no Indians in this neighbourhood," Mrs. Fanshawe remarked.

"Not now," I said, "but undoubtedly there were once. My supposition is that this place has a history. It was once badly haunted by spirits of the most dangerous type, which, for want of a better name, I will style neutrarians.

"These neutrarians are spirits that have never inhabited material bodies, and are only to be found in very remote and isolated districts, where the soil has rarely if ever been disturbed. They are invariably antagonistic to all forms of animal life, probably, because, if they were created first, which is quite feasible, they regard man as an interloper, and, probably, also because they covet man's body and are jealous of him. Many of the Indians believe that man is descended from the gods, and neutrarians from devils, and that the latter feel the distinction and hate man accordingly. Neutrarians vary considerably both in appearance, habits and constitution.

Whilst some can apparently reveal themselves at will, others can only do so by stealing vitality from human beings or animals. Let us now see how all of this applies to the present case. When you came to your house you did not get the impression it was haunted; it was only when you looked at the quarry—it was there you received your first impressions—and they were, in all probability, correct. I believe a great deal in first impressions, particularly with regard to the superphysical. This theory, too, namely, that the hauntings originated in the quarry, finds support in the fact that you found the blue stone close to the quarry, and that the figure you both saw coming along the carriage drive was coming from that direction. The blue stone, I believe, had been buried there and was dug up when the quarry was made; thus the stopper, so to speak, which kept the ghost in check being removed, the hauntings of course recommenced. Belonging to the species that cannot manifest itself without drawing vitality from some form or other of animal life, this neutrarian first attacked the gardener's wife, and then the maid, selecting these two on account of their unusual robustness. Had you not thrown the blue stone at it, and afterwards fixed the stone to your door, it is more than likely that you would both have succumbed."

"Then many diseases that have defied diagnosis, and there are countless such," Dr. Fanshawe exclaimed, "may very probably be due to neutrarians."

"I think it is very likely," I said. "I have noticed, for example, houses, where several people have been medically stated to have died of cancer, have been haunted by disturbances of a parellel nature to those you experienced."

"But are such hauntings to go on for ever?" Mrs. Fanshawe asked. "Is there no means of putting an end to them, saving by blue stones? How about exorcism?"

"I am not sure on that point," I said. "I certainly do not think that neutrarians or the spirits of imbeciles can

be exorcised satisfactorily, as I have known several cases of hauntings by these spirits in which exorcism has been practised, and in no instance has it had any effect whatsoever. I should say hauntings by neutrarians might last indefinitely ; I see no reason why they should not. Have you made any enquiries lately about the house ? "

" No," Mrs. Fanshawe replied, " not for some time. When we get back to Montreal, we will do so, and let you know." The conversation ended here.

A year later I received a letter from her husband. " I have been to the house," he wrote, " and the present occupants are leaving almost immediately. There have been three deaths there during their tenancy, and they complain of exactly the same disturbances that alarmed us. I have lent them the blue stone."

CHAPTER VIII

HAUNTINGS IN THE EAST END

HAVING come to the conclusion that it was quite impossible to earn a living in America, I returned to England as a steerage passenger on the German liner "Elbe."

It was the last homeward journey she was destined to go, for she was run into on her next outward voyage by the "Crathie," several hundred miles off the East Coast of England, and sunk with an appalling loss of life. The weather being particularly rough, we were about nine days at sea; and the fact that our quarters were extremely close, consisting of little more than a square foot to each person, coupled with food that I could not eat, made me sincerely thankful when the time came to go ashore. Apart from these details I had nothing to complain of in the way I was treated, for the crew—though barely concealing their hearty contempt for all but the first-class passengers—were to me civil enough. At the same time the experience—an experience I had not bargained for—was one I certainly do not desire to go through again.

I shall never forget how glad I was to find myself once more in an English restaurant, sitting down to a good, square English meal. I spent two nights in Southampton, travelling thence to London.

On arriving at Waterloo, I found myself almost as embarrassed as I had been in New York, for my knowledge of London was extremely limited. I had only been there—excepting when I was up for my Sandhurst Exam. —for an odd day occasionally, and then I had always stayed at a private hotel in Cambridge Street, Hyde Park. Now, however, my funds being no longer equal to the West End, I was forced to look elsewhere for a lodging. After a wearisome search, I at last found a room in Tennyson Street, S.E. That room will take a lot of forgetting. It was very small, very dark, and very beetly. I could hear whole armies of blackbeetles parading the floor and scaling the walls. Occasionally, one dropped with a thud seemingly close to me, and I sprang out of bed in terror, lest it had landed on the counterpane. I honestly believe I am as much afraid of cockroaches as I am of ghosts.

I only stayed in that house three days, and then moved into the attic of a coffee tavern in York Road. That was midway in the 'nineties, and York Road then was very different from what it is now. In the day-time it was full of frowsily dressed men and women and the fœtid steam from the cheaper kinds of restaurants.

I well remember one shop that boasted of hot rabbit dinners for fourpence ; and big pork pies, that had a peculiar fascination for blue-bottles, were sold there, all the year round, for threepence. I often wondered how many people those pies killed, and how any man could be such a villain as to sell them.

But if York Road was mean and squalid in the day-time, it was infinitely worse at night. I have never in any other street in London seen such an endless procession of women of the unfortunate class. They were nearly all German, and their hard, cruel faces should have been a sufficient warning to anyone to give them a wide berth. I haven't the slightest doubt that many of the young men who were foolish enough to be enticed

by them were ruthlessly robbed, and not infrequently murdered.

One very nasty incident took place just under my window. It was in the depths of December, and the snow lay thick on the ground. Will anyone who experienced it ever forget that Christmas of 1894. I was laid up with influenza, and was lying awake coughing, when I heard a loud shriek, followed by an oath, and a series of groans and gurgles. Then someone whistled, and a cab came up, after which all was quiet for a few minutes, when a crowd collected and a babel of voices arose.

In the morning my landlady, with a very white face, told me she had seen it all through her window; she slept in the basement, and had been too horrified to move. It appears that, shortly before midnight, a man had hidden in the doorway of the house, as if waiting for someone, and about ten minutes later a woman had come along, whom he hurled to the ground, and stabbed. When the woman had ceased groaning, the man whistled, and a cab came up. The driver, getting down from his seat, helped lift the woman into the vehicle; he and the murderer then climbed into the box, there was the crack of a whip, and the cab was gone. A few minutes afterwards a couple of policemen appeared on the scene, talked for some time, and then walked away, after which the street remained silent till dawn.

I went out and looked at the scene of the incident. There was abundant evidence on the doorstep and window-sill as to what had taken place, and seeing the people next door looking at it, I asked them if they had heard anything in the night. They shrugged their shoulders. "It's quite a common occurrence in this neighbourhood," they said, "and it would never do for us to take any notice of it. If we did, we should certainly, sooner or later, share the same fate as that woman." Thus, no attempt was made to bring the miscreant to justice, and the matter ended.

During the time I was with her, my landlady was robbed twice. On the first occasion two boys came into the front part of the shop and asked for some sandwiches. Whilst the landlady's daughter, who was alone behind the counter, was serving them, one of the boys snatched up a ham, the other threw down a chair, and both flew out of the shop. The girl rushed after them, but of course fell over the chair. Her cries brought her brother Bert and me to the rescue, and we set off in pursuit of the thieves. Although they had got some distance, Bert, being an astonishingly fast sprinter, had nearly caught them up, when the foremost of the boys abruptly halted, and, whirling round, flung the ham right at him. He ducked, and the ham landed with a splash in a puddle of rain water. Picking it up, we bore it triumphantly home, and it was soon resting on the counter, I hope—since it was to be sold as usual—none the worse for its adventure.

Episode number two did not end quite so happily. A young man with a clean-shaven face, and innocent, big blue eyes came to look for rooms. He spoke with a strong American accent, and said he was travelling for a well-known firm of jewellers in Boston. Whether it was the eyes, or thoughts of gold bracelets and pearl pendants, I cannot say—perhaps it was both ; anyhow, the landlady's daughter beamed on him, and from that day forth I became a person of second importance, if, indeed, of any importance at all. Whatever he said was law, and whatever he chose to wear was " most elegant." Then something happened, for which I was not altogether unprepared. He came down one morning carrying a somewhat bulky parcel, which he told the landlady's daughter was his dress suit. " It's too small for me," he said. " This bracing climate of yours has given me such an appetite, I've grown fat. I'm going to take it to the tailor down the street to see if he can enlarge it for me. By the way, can you change me this sovereign ? " He handed her a coin, and I saw him smile tenderly. Then

he went out of the shop with a pile of silver in his hand—and never came back. The sovereign was of course a bad one, and, worse still, the dress clothes were a new suit of Bert's, one for which he must have given at least three pounds.

I was not idle all the time I stayed in York Road. I was thrown on my own resources and had to find some means of making a livelihood. Expensive though my education had been, it was of little practical use to me now. The only subjects I knew anything about were those required for the Sandhurst and R.I.C. Examinations, and they in no way fitted me for business. A board-school youth with a knowledge of book-keeping and shorthand stood a much better chance of obtaining a clerkship than I did. It was a bitter revelation to me. I had always been brought up with the idea that breed and manners were a valuable asset.

I now discovered that without money and influence they were a handicap rather than otherwise. The majority of employers I interviewed were certainly not gentlemen, nor apparently did they care to have anything to do with such ; all they wanted was smartness in figures and the capacity of standing prodigiously long hours and any amount of bullying. I worked for a week in an office in Lewisham. My employer was a kind of jobbing stockbroker with a florid face and yards of gold watch-chain. My hours, as far as I can remember, were from nine to six, with twenty minutes interval for luncheon. The second day I was there I was kept at work till after seven, and the following day, by way of retaliation, I took a good hour over my lunch. When I got back to the office, I thought my employer would have died of apoplexy. I have never seen a man in such a fury.

" What do you think I pay you for ? " he shrieked ; " to eat ? "

" You haven't paid me yet," I responded ; " it will be time enough to give way to your emotions when you

have. You kept me here last night an hour longer than the time agreed. Very good ! You get an hour less work out of me to-day. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

He raised his thick, podgy hand, and I thought he was going to strike me, which I hoped he would do, for I have always been very fond of boxing, and a scrap with him just then would have been as nectar to me. To my astonishment, however, he suddenly subsided, and, walking out of the room, left me to go on with my work undisturbed. I left the office punctually at six that evening, and for the few remaining days I was with him, the prearranged hours were rigidly adhered to. That was my one and only experience in business. I tried to get on the staff of a newspaper, but although I wrote to almost every editor in London, I did not succeed. I am convinced that no post, outside that of a reporter, for which I had neither the training nor the inclination, can be obtained without the investment of money or colossal influence.

I managed, however, to do some free lance work, and I derived no little interest and amusement, though not much remuneration, interviewing for a weekly journal called " Theatricals." The first man of any note I met was the late Sir Augustus Harris, to whom I introduced myself on the stage of Drury Lane. It was during a rehearsal of the pantomime, at which, if I remember rightly, Harry Nicholls, Herbert Campbell, Dan Leno, and many other favourites of those times were present. Sir Augustus listened to what I had to say with great courtesy, and told me to go to Mr. Neil Forsyth. I did so, with the result that I was offered a small post on the staff of the theatre. I was grateful to Mr. Forsyth, who was one of the very kindest men that ever breathed, but apart from the smallness of the salary, there were obstacles in the way, and so I had to refuse.

About this time I met a girl with whom I became

madly infatuated, and when she refused to marry me, I seriously contemplated suicide. It was this episode that gave me the central idea for my first novel, " For Satan's Sake," in which I introduced the girl, and which is written very much round my own life.

I am only too thankful now that she did not accept me, for I do not know how I should have kept her, and that, apparently, as far as she was concerned, was the only thing that mattered.

I fought a desperate battle with myself for some time, and in the end came to the grim resolution to go on living. It was when I was recovering from this state of excessive mental dejection that I came in contact with an old acquaintance, a public schoolman, at whose suggestion I decided to try schoolmastering, and consequently obtained a post at Daventry Grammar School.

But I must now return to the principal subject of this narrative, namely, ghosts.

During the year I was in York Road I thoroughly explored the East End, and in the coffee houses and restaurants of Poplar, Deptford, Tilbury and Whitechapel I heard many first-hand accounts of hauntings. Though it is not generally known, the East End of London is far more haunted than the West. On one of my nocturnal rambles, I made the acquaintance of a Russian Jew, who had an extraordinary mania for spiders, which he kept in specially designed boxes with glass lids. On their half-holidays he used to set his children to work collecting flies and other insects, and the whole family used to revel in watching the spiders gorge themselves on their victims. You could see he was innately cruel by the hard twinkling of his little black eyes, and the spasmodic twitching of his flat, greasy, white fingers, but he was something of a scholar and he had a devout dread of ghosts. " There is a haunted house close to here," he said to me one evening ; " if you like to come with me I will introduce you to the owner.

He is a Chinaman, called King Ho, or some such outlandish name, and he keeps an opium den."

King Ho did not require much of an introduction, for, as soon as we entered, he fixed his little slit-like eyes on me and said:

"Well, what do you want? A smoke?"

"No," I said. "I've come to hear about your ghosts. I'm interested in them."

"There are plenty of them here," he murmured; "the house is full of them. Sit down!"

I obeyed, and the Russian Jew went back to his spiders and left me alone with the Chinaman.

It was a dirty, sordid, ill-ventilated place, reeking with a dozen different odours, and suggestive of vermin *ad libitum*, and diseases of an Oriental origin and unspeakable nature. A curtain was drawn across one end of the room, and noticing that my eyes wandered off in that direction, King Ho got up and pulled aside the drapery. Two wooden berths, one above the other, were discovered; the top one was empty, and the lower occupied by a corpse-like Chinaman, who was lying on his side, facing us, with absolutely no expression in his eyes or mouth. He might have been dead the best part of a week.

"He's away in the rice fields of his native home," King Ho said, "talking to his wife and playing with his children. He goes there every night at this time"—and he glanced at the big, round. wooden clock hanging on the wall.

"You mean he is dreaming," I said.

"No, I don't," King Ho retorted. "I mean he's there—his spirit, his intelligence is there. That thing you are looking at is only his material body. He, and I, and others we know, don't set much value on that, we can get out of it so easily. It's the immaterial self we esteem."

Then, seeing I was interested, he resumed his chair,

and stretching out his long, thin, yellow hand, he touched me on the arm.

"Listen," he said, "we, Chinamen, who come from the fields and mountains, and grow up in close touch with Nature, can concentrate. From our infancy upwards we think deeply. We think of the sky, the stars, the sun, the moon, the mighty Hoang Ho River and the vast range of the Pelings. We think of them in a sense quite different from the sense in which you Londoners would think of them. You would regard them as so many objects only —sky and land-marks. We think of them as spirits that can act as magnets to our spirits—as intelligences akin to ourselves, that can, when once we become thoroughly acquainted with them, draw us to them. The Pelings live just as much as you and I live—you might pull down their body, that great, elevated frame you style the mountains, just as you might overturn that bench; but the real, the spiritual Pelings would still remain. When once you grasp the idea that all Nature lives—that everything, even to the chairs and tables, have immaterial representatives, then you will begin to understand the principle of the concentration we practise. You must see the Pelings, the Hoang-Ho, the rice fields, not as they would appear to the man in the street here, here in London, Piccadilly, but as we, who live near them and know them, see them—as figures that can see and hear, figures with intelligence, expression—intense expression in their eyes. When you see them like that, you will get to love them, and, when you love them, you will unconsciously concentrate on them, as you do on all things that you love. Your love will not be in vain, it will be reciprocated, and the love that reciprocates yours will, as a magnet, draw you—you—your immaterial ego—your true self—towards it. Now you begin to understand, I can tell by your face. The Chinaman—the Chinaman of the plains and hills—like myself, *thinks*—he knows Nature, and when he leaves China

and comes over here, he concentrates until he hears the voice of that Nature calling to him; and when he hears it, his spirit is gently freed from his material body, and borne silently and instantaneously to his home.

"Now, he can think best when he can get some at least of the conditions of his native surroundings—and the most important of them is silence. Not silence such as you may understand it, but the silence of the conscious, inanimate hills, and rivers, and plains—and the only way to procure it is through opium—the opium I supply. Hence he comes here, takes it, and lies over yonder, and thinks, till he hears the call and his spirit is released."

"But the ghosts," I interrupted, "the ghosts you spoke about."

"Wait," he said. "Listen! Sometimes men have come here who have lost the love of the spirit of the mountain and river. They have lost it because they have liked too much this London of yours, and have imbibed too deeply of that detestable immorality, which so weakens the spirit that it cannot, even if it heard the call, get away from the flesh. I tell those men that my opium will do them no good, but they take it; they take it, and dream as Englishmen would dream—with their spirits chained to their material bodies. When these depraved Chinamen awake and realise that they can never, never again, be drawn by the mighty, majestic love of the Spirit of the Mountain and River, and that they can never again revisit the home of their childhood, so bitter is their disappointment that they kill themselves—not always here, but anywhere—in their lodgings, in the river, or in the docks. Their spirits then invariably come here, where, undoubtedly, they renew their vain efforts to get back to China—to the mighty, majestic Spirit of the Mountain and River, whose love they have lost. Look in that top berth and tell me what you see there?"

"It's empty," I said.

"Look again," he replied.

I did so, but still there was nothing there, only just the bare, dingy panelling.

"Well," he asked, "what now?"

"Nothing," I said; "absolutely nothing."

"Go up to it and put one hand inside," he remarked.

I did so, and sprang back with a loud cry. I had touched a face!

"Yes," he said, as I stepped out into the semi-darkness of the causeway, "it frightens some people, but it never frightens me, because I know that the only consolation possible for these unhappy spirits is to lie next to, or to come in contact with, the bodies of those whose spirits are walking and talking with their fond ones in distant China."

Whilst I was at York Road I became acquainted with an Irish doctor, whom I will call Flynn. He ran a surgery not far from King Ho's house. Flynn belonged to a famous secret society, whose fundamental object was to carry on a doctrine of surreptitious hatred to England and all things English. Though I had no sympathy with such a society—for I have always held the opinion that, however badly England behaved to Ireland in the past, the majority of the English people of to-day are only too anxious to act fairly to her, and therefore it is better to let bygones be bygones—I found Flynn a very original and entertaining character. All his patients were either Irish or of foreign extraction, and whenever any English person came to the surgery, he flatly refused to attend them.

One evening, when I was sitting chatting with him in front of a blazing peat fire—Flynn would never burn English coal—two Swedish engineers came into the surgery, and Flynn, who, for some peculiar reason, was particularly partial to the Swedes, asked them to join us at supper. The meal certainly was not in the approved style of the West End, nor, perhaps, would it have

appealed to the nouveau riche ; for there was no snowy tablecloth, no serviettes, no champagne, no liqueurs ; it consisted of boiled beef, suet dumplings, potatoes—boiled in their skins, of course—and plenty, yes, plenty, of stout and whiskey ; and it was very welcome to the four hungry, healthy men, who did ample justice to it. After we had finished, and pipes were produced, I brought up the subject of ghosts—never very far from my mind—and one of the Swedes laughed.

" Ghosts," he said, " there are no such things. Neither ghosts nor fairies. I believe in nothing. There is no God, no devil, no heaven, no hell. When we die, we die—there is no future life whatever."

" Let's have a séance," Flynn said, " and see if we can't convince him. I have the skeleton of a murderer in the room overhead. I will fetch it down, and it shall sit round the table with us."

" All right ! " the sceptical Swede, whose name was Nielssen, said. " Fetch it down ; fetch twenty skeletons you like, the more the merrier. Nothing will convince me.

Flynn ran upstairs, and presently reappeared with a tall skeleton in his arms. The table was cleared, and we all sat round it with our hands spread out after the usual manner of table turners, the skeleton being placed between the two Swedes, each of whom had hold of one of its hands. Flynn then turned down the lights, and we started asking the table questions, many of which, I fear, were of a very ribald and frivolous nature. Every now and then it gave a big tilt, and Nielssen shouted, " That's for me ! It's my mother-in-law—she's found out I've been making love to my landlady's daughter." Once there was a rap, and for the moment I was taken in. Then the other Swede, Heilborn, cried out, " It's only Nielssen. He did it with his foot ; he's incorrigible ! " This sort of thing went on for some time, Flynn and Nielssen constantly playing some prank, and Heilborn and myself not always too serious.

Suddenly the atmosphere of the room seemed to undergo a change, and, as if by common consent, we were all silent. Then Nielssen uttered a sharp cry of pain.

"Strike a light quickly," he cried; "my hand is being hurt frightfully!"

We did so, and Nielssen gave vent to an expression of relief.

"How did it happen?" Heilborn asked.

"I don't know," Nielssen said faintly. He was evidently much shaken, and spoke with the emotion of a man who has undergone some violent shock. "I was only holding the skeleton the same as you, when I suddenly felt its fingers close like a vice on mine. It was a grip of iron. See, my hand is crushed almost out of shape!" He held it out, and we all bent over it curiously. Compared with the other hand, it looked singularly white and limp, and when Flynn touched it, Nielssen very perceptibly winced.

Flynn gave him some brandy, and after a little while he seemed himself again; but he would not continue the séance. "There's something very odd about the skeleton," he said. "I don't believe in spirits, as you know, but there must be something closely akin to one attached to this thing," and he gave it a vicious kick with his foot.

A week later, when I called at Flynn's house, he told me that Nielssen was in bed. He had fallen downstairs and badly bruised his spine, besides breaking a leg. "He'll get over it all right," Flynn said, "but it will be some time before he can do anything. His account of the accident is most remarkable; in fact, he declares that it wasn't an accident, that he was deliberately thrown. He swears that he distinctly saw a skeleton hand suddenly catch hold of him round the ankle, and that the next moment he felt himself whirling through the air. He is most emphatic in his declaration that he will never again scoff at ghosts or play with the invisible. And now,"

Flynn added, " the wretched thing has begun to plague me. I can't get a decent night's sleep. As soon as I begin to dose I am visited by the most disturbing dreams. I invariably hear knocking at the door, and when I open it, something rushes in and strangles me. But the worst of it is, I hear the knocking when I'm awake, too. Sometimes it begins directly I get into bed, before my head has touched the pillow. Knock, knock, knock !—the hard, sharp knock of bony knuckles on door, walls and furniture. I am not actually frightened, but I don't like it. What do you make of it ? "

" If it's not the skeleton, the spirit of some depraved human," I replied, " it's some other equally low and vicious earth-bound, one of the class that visit séances and attach themselves to the unlucky sitter. You might try getting rid of the skeleton—have it cremated and see what effect that has."

Flynn took my advice ; the skeleton was reduced to ashes, and the ashes buried many miles away from Limehouse Causeway, after which, the disturbances, as far as Flynn was concerned, at any rate, entirely ceased. Whether Nielssen was victimised again I cannot say. He rejoined his ship as soon as he had recovered, and since then he has completely passed out of my existence.

There was a house I used occasionally to go to in Whitechapel, a rendezvous of itinerant free lance writers like myself, where, although I never actually saw any ghostly phenomena, I always had very extraordinary impressions. The moment I crossed the threshold, I fancied I was in a big funeral procession following a hearse. It was a dull, winter's day, I thought ; there were inches of slush on the ground, and the cold was intense. I could not see the faces of the people walking beside me, but I instinctively knew that they wore an expression of extreme relief, and that some even of them should-be mourners laughed. We tramped on till we came to a steep hill, then there was a loud report, and at once

everything became chaotic. After this my mind gradually cleared and the impressions abruptly ceased. There was no variation in these impressions, they always began and ended in precisely the same way; moreover, I invariably received them whenever I entered the house. I mentioned my experience one day to an habitué of the place, and he quite casually informed me that several men who went there had had similar experiences, and he thought the landlord, if approached tactfully, might offer some sort of explanation. Acting upon this suggestion, I spoke to the landlord, and learned from him that half a century or more ago the house was owned by a wealthy tradesman, who, it was generally supposed, had made his money by sweating his employés. When he died, all the hands had to attend his funeral, but far from looking sad, as they followed the coffin, they had exhibited every manifestation of joy. Just as the procession had reached the summit of a steep hill, a half-witted man fired a gun from a cottage window, and the horses drawing the hearse, taking fright, dashed down the incline and into a wall at the foot of it. Strange to say, no one was injured, but the coffin was thrown out and broken to pieces. The event made a great impression upon the minds of all who witnessed it, and the landlord informed me that I was by no means the only person who, upon entering the house, had received a vivid mental picture of the scene.

I am often asked if I am a consistent medium. No, I am not. It is only at times I see ghosts, only at times I receive vivid impressions, and I do not believe that any person, however mediumistic, can depend upon his or her psychic faculty for consistency. I have been to several public séances, where professional mediums have had the audacity to say they see spirits standing beside practically everyone in the assembly. They rattle off the description of an alleged spirit, as if it were a part in a well-rehearsed play—and play it undoubtedly is to any-

one who pauses to reflect. Genuine phantasms do not come to order quite so readily.

In olden times, when people were really psychic, those versed in the art from their childhood upwards could only raise a ghost with great difficulty, and often, only by resorting to spells, many of which were of a very subtle and complex nature. And when, in the end, they did succeed, such manifestations invariably had a very alarming effect on the medium as well as the spectator. How is it, then, that so many of the professional mediums of to-day can not only see visitants from the other world, whenever they like, all around them, but can view these ghostly visitants without being in the least disconcerted, without—as the saying is—turning a hair? Have they really stronger nerves than had Saul, and a closer, far closer intimacy with the Unknown than had the Witch of Endor, or can it be that the Spirit World has so participated in our age of quickness—our rapid forms of locomotion—that a medium has only to raise his or her eyebrows and a host of spirits at once whiz into the room? I do not think so. I believe that such mediums —the mediums whose psychic vision is apparently inexhaustible, and can be turned on and off to order—are either unmitigated humbugs or hysterical dupes, who mistake the baldest impressions for actual spiritual phenomena.

The unmitigated humbug has only to describe the alleged presence with a little elasticity, and the description will surely fit—albeit somewhat loosely—one or another of our departed friends. Who amongst us does not know someone on the other side passably good-looking, rather tall, of medium colouring, and somewhat stout? And if we plead that we do not, it is of no consequence—the medium glibly asserts that the spirit he or she describes has got behind our chair by mistake, and is really searching for someone else. But apart from this obvious fraud, can we believe that any one of those whom

we have loved and lost would so degrade themselves and us as to appear at a public séance before a company of strangers. Surely we would rather not see them at all, than see them in such circumstances. At any rate, we would rather—much rather—possess our souls in patience, until our departed loved ones can appear to us in private—as they sometimes can—without the intervention of any medium whatsoever.

With regard to automatic or spirit writing, there is, I believe, just as much fraud practised. The mere fact that Sir somebody or other has a touching belief in one or two of these automatic scribes is quite enough for most people, and, consequently, they never dream of questioning the integrity of any medium who professes to convey to them messages from the dead. It is sufficient that the man with the title, the great man of science, believes. But they forget, often wilfully forget, that the cleverest man is often the most simple ; that a great judge has not unfrequently had his pockets picked ; and that eminence in one direction by no means denotes ability in another.

Snobbishness is responsible for much. The big man is credulous, and because he is credulous the little man is credulous too. Hence, consistency in the spirit world, in clairvoyance, in automatic writing, is, for the moment, almost universally accepted, and direct communication with the spirit world erroneously looked upon as an every-day occurrence. It will be otherwise when the man in the street wakes up and discovers the occult for himself. Experience will, I think, teach him, as it has taught me, that although ghosts may on very rare occasions come to order—and when they do, their coming is, I believe, quite as surprising to the medium as it is to the audience—by far the greater number of superphysical phenomena appear spontaneously ; and it is through such spontaneous appearances only that we can hope to make any progress in our communication with the other world.

CHAPTER IX

NIGHT RAMBLINGS ON WIMBLEDON COMMON AND HOUNSLOW HEATH

If there are any places in London that should be more haunted than others, assuredly those places are the parks and commons. When I was living on the south side of the river, I spent many nights tramping about Wimbledon, Clapham, Wandsworth, Tooting and Streatham Commons. Since then I have lived at Blackheath, Hampstead, Hounslow and Dulwich, so that I may say I know pretty nearly every inch of these places. I can see myself now standing on Wimbledon Common close to a pool, in the dead of night. No one about, and the reflection of the moon staring at me from the unruffled surface of the water. I am trying to get impressions of any event that may have taken place there. I got none. Suddenly a hand falls on my shoulder; I swing round, and peering into my face is the white, haggard face of a tramp.

"You ain't going to drown yourself, are you?" he said.

"Why?" I asked, anticipating a severe rebuke from this withered and worn scarecrow of humanity.

"Why," he said, "because don't do it here! I can show you a much better spot, where the water is deep, and where, when once you get in, you can't very easily get out."

" But how will that benefit you ? " I enquired, wondering why he was so eager.

" You can let me have your clothes, can't you ? " he explained ; " you won't want to take them with you into the next world. From what I hears about it, sperrits don't need neither coats nor trousers, and the few shillings I shall get for them will do me a bit of good, and won't hurt you."

" But I wasn't contemplating suicide," I remarked. " I'm not tired of life yet."

" Ain't you," he said, in extremely disappointed tones. " Then why are you out here at this time of night ? "

" If it comes to that," I observed, " why are you ? "

" I ain't got nowhere else to go," he said ; " and there are no police out here to disturb anyone."

" Nor ghosts ? " I remarked.

" Ghosts ! " he chuckled. " I'm not afraid of ghosts. I shall soon be one myself, I expect ; but there is one spot here I don't go near after dark."

" Why ? "

" Why," he said. " Come along with me, and maybe you'll guess."

Had he been anything like my size I should not have gone, for his appearance was very far from assuring, but, as he was a small man, I felt comparatively safe. We walked side by side over the grass, crossed a gleaming, white path, and steering in a slightly northerly direction —I could tell that much by the stars—abruptly halted in front of a shallow pit, on the other side of which was a big bush.

" It's there," he said, pointing at the pit. " I've tried to sleep there twice, and each time I've been woken up by hearing something heavy fall close to my head. It seems to come from the bush. It's the bush that skeers me," he added, " and though I don't mind passing it in the day-time, nothing on earth will persuade me to look behind it after dark."

" Not even sixpence," I said, fingering that coin in my waistcoat pocket.

" Go on," he said, " you haven't sixpence, otherwise you'd not be here. You're joking. If anyone really did offer me sixpence now to do it, well, I don't say but what I mightn't try."

He spoke so hungrily and looked so famished that I decided to part with it, though sixpence to me just then had a particularly real value. I showed it him. " Look behind that tree," I said, " and I'll give it you."

He set off at once. " No," I called out, " that won't do ; you must go through the pit." He proceeded to obey, and was in the middle of the hollow, when I distinctly heard something very heavy strike the ground apparently close to him. I ran round the bush, just in time to see what I thought was a black shadow shoot across the ground and disappear in a neighbouring cluster of trees. When I returned, the tramp was still in the pit, but I could see nothing there to account for the noise.

" Well," he said. " Did you hear it ? "

" I heard something," I replied, " and there's your sixpence."

I often went to Wimbledon Common afterwards, but never again saw the tramp, nor found the hollow.

My Blackheath and Greenwich Park experiences, or at least most of them, are narrated fully in my " Haunted Houses of London," so that I can only refer briefly to them here.

From the impressions I got, when walking on the Common at Blackheath, I shall always believe that the superphysical influences there are particularly demoralising. It always seemed to me that Blackheath—by the way a curiously appropriate name—might be the rendezvous of the very worst type of earth-bound phantasms of the dead, and of the most vicious neutrarians.

After leaving London and entering on my scholastic career, I was first of all a master at Daventry, then tutor

in an Irish family at Aldershot, and then, in succession, a master in preparatory schools at Wandsworth, Hereford and Blackheath. Of these various posts, I liked that at Blackheath the least, partly because the headmaster there was the most unmitigated snob, and my pupils hopelessly spoilt, and partly because I had such a detestation of the heath after dark.

My only consolation in those days was cricket and writing. Every evening, after my work with the boys was done, I repaired to a room over a library in Blackheath village, and it was there that I completed my first novel, "For Satan's Sake."

The book deals with the soul of a suicide, and was based, as I have already stated, on my experiences in America and York Road, Lambeth. I tried it with various publishers, but without success, and it was not until six years later, when I was living in a small fishing town in Cornwall, that I eventually got it taken. It so happened that a well-known novelist came to see me one day, and when I told him that I had attempted a book, he said he would like to see it. I fished it out of the box, where it had lain undisturbed for years, and he went off with it, subsequently showing it to a reader of a publishing firm—also a well-known novelist—who was staying in the town at the time, and who was so impressed with it, that he advised his firm to accept it. It did not even then come out for over a year, and the anxiety of awaiting my début as an author can better be imagined than described. The success I prayed for was not showered upon me, but the book was well received on the whole, and paved the way for other works to follow.

And now, let me hie back to London and its commons. Though Hampstead has, in all probability, its share of phantasms, my impressions there have been of a more agreeable nature than at Blackheath. I spent the greater part of several consecutive nights one summer sitting on a bench in a very rustic glade on the heath, waiting for

anything that might happen. Once or twice between one and two something seemed to be making a violent effort to materialise, and I fully expected to see a figure suddenly appear before me. My impressions were that it would be the figure of a woman, and that she would be carrying a white bundle in her arms. I felt that she was in great trouble and wanted to ask me for advice. I associated her worries with a big house that used to stand somewhere near the summit of Hampstead Hill. I felt all this very acutely, and I used to repeat aloud my willingness to do anything I could to assist her.

Strange to say, a few years later, I met a lady who told me that she had had a curious experience in the same spot. She was walking through it rather late one autumn evening, accompanied by her dog, a big black retriever. When she came to the seat where I used to sit, the dog started barking and showed signs of great terror. Somewhat alarmed, she was about to hurry on, when a voice close to her said, "It's only me, Winifred; don't be frightened. The boat I sailed in to America was wrecked, and only the child was saved."

The lady looked round, but there was no one in sight. On reaching home, she mentioned the incident to her mother, who exclaimed in astonishment, "Well, that is odd! I was sitting on a seat, I should think in that very spot, about forty years ago—we were living in D—— House, on Haverstock Hill, at the time—when a letter was brought me announcing the loss of a big sailing vessel in the Atlantic, on which my maid, Winnie, as we used to call her, had sailed with her husband to America. Only a very few of the passengers and crew survived, and Winnie and her husband were both drowned. But I never knew they had a child."

Hounslow Heath should teem with ghosts, for it once swarmed with foot-pads, who, after committing every conceivable act of violence on and around the heath, usually ended their career there on gibbets. I once had

rooms near the Bath Road, and spent many nights rambling about the Heath in quest of ghostly adventure. One evening I kept fancying I was followed everywhere by a tall, muffled figure, and when, in alarm, I hastened over the grass on to the roadway, I heard a low, cynical laugh. All the way home the steps seemed to pursue me, and when I got into bed and prepared to blow out the light, I saw the curtains by the window rustle and swell out, as if someone was behind them. It was a long time before I ventured to blow out the light, and, when I slept, I dreamed a dark, hooded figure was bending over me.

On another occasion, as I perambulated the heath, where the trees were thickly clustered and the undergrowth had become the densest tangle, I caught a glimpse of two men playing dice. I heard their laughter and the rattling of the box, as they shook it in the air and threw out the dice. Then suddenly their gaiety was turned to wrath—there were oaths and blows, cries and groans, and all became silent, save for the soughing and moaning of the wind through the lofty tree-tops. But as I came away from the heath, there was again that cynical laugh, and again footsteps seemed to follow me home, and again the curtain by the window of my room shook and swelled.

I did not go to the heath one night ; I lay awake in bed instead, and about the hour I had usually returned I heard steps, long, swinging steps coming down the little side road towards the house. My memory at once went back to that night in Dublin, and I strained my ears to catch the accompanying sound. I had not long to wait—it soon came, the same old familiar click, click, click ! In an agony of fear, lest the steps should stop at the house and there should be a repetition of the terrible knocking at the door, I lighted a candle and sat up. Nearer and nearer they came, and then, when I felt certain they would stop, to my infinite relief they went on. On past the house, the echoes ringing out loud and clear in the keen, frosty air, until they reached the Bath Road.

I fully expected some misfortune would happen to me after this occurrence, as the last time I had heard the steps had been at the time of my failure to pass the medical for the R.I.C., and shortly before my disastrous trip to America. Yet nothing of a specially untoward nature happened. Apparently, the steps on this occasion merely heralded another change in my vocation, for I shortly afterwards became imbued with the desire to be an actor, and commenced what was destined to be a lively, though very brief theatrical career, as a pupil in the Henry Neville Studio, Oxford Street.

Before, however, passing on to subsequent events, I must relate one other—the only other—ghostly happening I experienced at Hounslow. In a remote corner of the heath there was one spot that had a peculiar fascination for me, and, whenever I returned from it, I dreamed the same dream—that a beautiful girl in an old-world costume, with fair hair, large, blue eyes and daintily-moulded lips, approached my bed and leaned over me. She had the most appealing expression in her face, and seemed to be anxious to make me her confidant. I was always about to address her, when some extraordinary metamorphosis took place, and I awoke, palpitating with terror.

The dream greatly impressed me, and I tried my best to discover a reason for it. I did eventually, but not until the year I published " Some Haunted Houses of England and Wales," when I got into correspondence with a very old lady, whom I will call Miss Carmichael. Miss Carmichael lived at Ealing, close to the Parish Church, and wrote to me to the effect that, if I liked to call on her, she could tell me a curious tale about an old house that used to stand on the outskirts of Hounslow Heath. Of course I accepted this invitation.

I found Miss Carmichael, when I called, lying on a sofa, crippled with rheumatism, but otherwise in the full possession of all her senses, and wonderfully

vivacious, despite the fact that she was well over ninety.

" The house I want to tell you about," she said, " was called ' The Gables.' It was a large, old-fashioned manor house with very extensive grounds, and at the beginning of the last century it belonged to my aged relative, Miss Denning. She never lived in it herself, but she kept it in excellent repair, and at her death, in or about 1820, her nephew inherited an apparently valuable property. Now, Tom Denning had a great friend, Dick Mayhew, and it was from Dick Mayhew, who was also a great friend of mine, that I heard the most detailed account of the hauntings. I will try and tell you the story just as my friend told it to me." *

" I was sitting in my stuffy office in Jermyn Street one spring morning, when, who should suddenly walk in but Tom Denning, whom I had not seen for some time. ' Why, Dick,' he said, ' how fagged and run down you look. A spell in the country is what you need, it would do you all the good in the world. Supposing you come down to my place at Hounslow, and have a blow on the Heath. I keep a couple of horses, and you can ride all day if you like.'

" What surprises you spring on one," I ejaculated. " I didn't know you were living so near London—and at Hounslow, too ! Aren't you afraid of highwaymen. I hear they still visit the place occasionally. How long have you been there ? "

" I haven't been there yet," Dick replied with a laugh ; " at least, not to stay. The property has just been left me by my aunt. It's a queer old house, just the kind of place a romantic beggar like you would like, and if any house ought to be haunted, it ought. They say a murder was once committed there by an ancestress of mine, a girl whose face was as beautiful as she herself

* I have reproduced the gist of this narrative in my own language.

was evil, and that her spirit still roams the house and grounds."

"I should certainly like to see her," I said, "and so, I am sure, would Greg." (Greg was Dick's bloodhound).

"Well, I'll give you both an opportunity," Tom laughed. "Take Greg with you, and a friend too, if you like, for I may not be able to join you at once."

"I accepted, and in due course arrived at 'The Gables,' accompanied by my cousin Ralph, who was then a Lieutenant in the Buffs, and Greg.

"The grounds surrounding 'The Gables,' which stood near the edge of the heath, were encompassed by a very high, red-brick wall, and consisted of a broad, well-kept lawn in front, a small spinney on one side, an extensive shrubbery on the other, and big kitchen gardens at the back. The house itself, seventeenth century and covered with ivy from tip to toe, was picturesque in the extreme. There were no servants, only the caretakers, a middle-aged man and his wife, who occupied rooms in the east wing. The west wing was reserved for us.

"After dinner, in a hall so enormous that it made us feel positively lilliputian, we wandered out into the garden. It was a glorious night, the sky one mass of silver, scintillating stars, the air redolent with the odour of spring flowers. 'By Jove,' Ralph remarked to me, as we strolled across the lawn, 'By Jove! No one would think we were so close to that God-forsaken heath; why, it was only a few years ago that a fellow in my regiment was set on there, and, after being robbed of all he had on him, half beaten to death with bludgeons. It's one of the worst cut-throat spots round London. Then he uttered an exclamation of surprise and jogged my elbow.

"Coming towards us from the house was the figure of a young girl. She wore a white dress with a dark cloak flung loosely over her shoulders, and the moonlight playing over her face revealed a countenance of extraordinary delicacy and beauty. Her eyes were large and childlike in their expression, her lips daintily modelled, her teeth

wonderfully white and even, her hair golden. Whether it was the effect of the moonlight on them or not, I cannot say, but her cheeks were absolutely devoid of colour, almost strikingly pale, whilst I fancied I detected in the slightly open mouth an expression of pain. I saw every detail most distinctly, even to the shape of her fingers, which were very pointed. She came on without apparently noticing us, and we watched her trip past us and disappear in the spinney.

" ' What a stunner ! ' Ralph exclaimed. " I don't know when I've seen a prettier face ! Sly fellow, Denning ! I wonder who she can be ! ' He had hardly finished speaking when we heard the most awful scream, a shriek of terror and despair, such as sent all the blood in my body to my heart, and left the rest of me like ice.

" ' My God ! What's happened to her ? ' Ralph gasped. ' She's being murdered. Quick ! ' We dashed into the spinney, but despite the fact that we searched everywhere, no girl was to be found.

" Returning to the house, we made enquiries of the caretakers, who were vehement in their denial of knowing the girl or of having heard her cries. Much puzzled, we then retired to our night quarters. The room that had been assigned to us, for we preferred to share one between us, was situated about midway down a long, narrow corridor, lighted at the further end by a casement window, across which sprays of ivy blew to and fro in the cool breeze.

" For a long time we sat in front of the fire chatting, but at one o'clock Ralph got up, and exclaimed that it was high time we turned into bed.

" ' Hullo, look at Greg ! ' he said, pointing to the dog, who was crouching on the floor in front of the door showing its teeth in a series of savage growls. ' What's the matter with him ? '

" Before I had time to reply, we suddenly heard a regular, measured tap, tap, tap, as of high-heeled shoes, coming along the corridor towards our door.

"'That can't be either the caretaker or his wife,' Ralph whispered. 'I wonder if it's the young lady! Perhaps she's going to pay us a surreptitious visit. I only wish she would—the little darling!'

"Nearer and nearer came the steps, until they seemed to stop just outside our door. Greg's hair bristled, he gave a deep growl, and retreated half way across the room. Then there came a loud knock on the door, followed by the sound of a violent scuffle. Springing forward, Ralph threw the door wide open. There was nothing there, only the cold light of the moon, and the white, motionless faces of the Dennings' ancestors hanging on the walls.

"'It's deuced odd,' Ralph said. 'I swear I heard steps and a knock, and yet there's nothing to account for it. Could it have been rats?'

"'I don't think so,' I said; 'rats wouldn't have frightened Greg. Look at him now; he has quite recovered.' Greg had come to my side and was licking my hand and wagging his tail.

"In the morning I asked the caretaker's wife if the place was haunted.

"'Haunted,' she stammered. 'No. Whatever made you think of such a thing, sir! There ain't no such things as ghosts. It's them howls you 'eard.'

"Seeing there was nothing to be got out of her, Ralph and I did not refer to the subject again, but spent our time reading in the library, and wandering about the heath.

"In the evening we sauntered out into the garden and tried to coax Greg to come with us, but he resolutely refused, and so we had to leave him behind. Just about the same time as on the previous evening, and in identically the same place, we again saw the girl.

"'I'll speak to her, hanged if I don't,' Ralph muttered, and taking off his hat, he stepped forward and accosted her. Without apparently perceiving us, she passed resolutely on, and, entering the spinney, was speedily

lost to sight. Almost directly afterwards, the same awful, wailing scream rose shrill and high on the still night air. This time we did not rush after her, but, walking hurriedly back to the house, we sought the companionship of the bright and cheery fireside.

" At one o'clock we were again seated in our bedroom, and the events of the preceding night were repeated in every detail.

" On the morrow Tom joined us. When we told him of the ghost, he became intensely interested.

" ' It must be my ancestress,' he said. ' The girl who was supposed to have murdered somebody. I'll sit up with you two fellows to-night and we'll have the door open.'

" After dinner we all three went into the garden.

" ' It's here we first caught sight of her,' Ralph exclaimed, as we halted on the lawn, ' here, and precisely at this hour. Yes—by Jove !—and there she is ! '

" I looked, and there was the figure I knew so well, tripping daintily towards us, her yellow hair and silver shoe buckles gleaming furiously in the moonlight.

" ' She wears a hood,' Tom cried, ' and it completely hides her face.'

" ' What ! ' Ralph retorted ; ' she has no hood, you must be dreaming.'

" As before, the girl passed us and we lost sight of her amongst the trees. The next moment, and we again heard her scream. Then we searched everywhere, but with no result. She was certainly not on the premises, and as there was no avenue of escape save by scaling a ten foot wall, we could only conclude she had melted into fine air, in other words—vanished.

" ' I'll get to the bottom of this mystery,' Tom growled between his teeth, ' if I root up every tree in the garden.'

" ' What you've seen so far,' Ralph observed, ' is only the prelude. There's more to come, and I'm not sure if Act II. is not the most exciting. What do you think, Dick ? '

" ' Ask Greg,' I replied. ' I believe he knows more about it than we do.'

" On arriving indoors, we all three retired to the bedroom we had agreed to share. The night was so exquisite that I sat by the open window. Directly beneath me was the gravel drive, which lay like a broad, white belt encircling the house, and beyond it, on the level sweep of lawn, danced the shadows from the larch and fir trees in the paddock ; the only sign of life came from the bats and night birds that wheeled and skimmed in silent flight in and out the bushes. There was very little breeze, sufficient only to make the ivy rustle and the window in the corridor outside give the faintest perceptible jar. I gazed at my companions. Ralph lay on the sofa, sound asleep, a half-serious, half-amused look on his handsome features, while Tom sat in an armchair directly in front of the fire, his head buried in the palms of his hands, as if wrapt in profound thought. A distant church clock boomed one. Greg growled, and Tom, at once springing up, flung the door widely back on its hinges. ' There,' he said. ' Come what may, we're ready for it.' As he concluded, there came a tapping.

" Tap, tap, tap ; someone in high-heeled shoes was walking over the polished oak boards of the corridor in our direction. To me there was a world of stealth and cautiousness in the sounds, that suggested a host of conflicting motives. As the steps drew nearer, the door suddenly swung to with a loud crash, and before we had time to recover from our astonishment, someone rapped. With a shout of baffled rage, Tom leaped to his feet and tore at the handle. The massive door at once flew open. The corridor was empty—only moonbeams and pictures —nothing more.

" The following day was wet, and we stayed indoors, all the morning and afternoon, reading. As it cleared up a little towards supper-time, Tom proposed going for a short walk. We slipped on our overcoats, and were crossing the big entrance hall to the front door, when

Tom suddenly exclaimed, ' Hang it ! I've left my pipe upstairs. I say, wait a minute, you fellows, till I get it.' He started running, and then stopped short, giving vent to a loud exclamation. Ascending the broad staircase in front of us was a form, whose back view exactly resembled that of the golden-haired beauty we had seen in the garden. Where she had sprung from we could not say. We only knew she was there.

" ' By Jove ! I'll see her face this time,' Tom said. ' I'll see it, even if I have to force her to turn round.' He ran after her, and, mounting the stairs two at a time, stretched out his hand to pluck at her sleeve. She turned, and her face was to us a blank. What Tom saw we never knew. Shouting, ' Take the damned thing away from me ! ' he stepped back and fell ; and when we ran forward, we found him lying at the foot of the stairs—dead."

The property, Miss Carmichael informed me, passed to a distant relative, who, after trying in vain to let it, pulled it down. The ghost, it was rumoured, was that of a very beautiful ancestress of the Dennings, who, after leading a life, evil even for those times, disappeared. What happened to her material body no one ever knew, but her spirit was supposed to haunt the house and grounds in dual form. To the stranger, that is to say, to those outside her own family, she appeared in all the radiant beauty of her earthly body, but to the Dennings she seldom revealed her face. When she did, they beheld something too terrible for the mind to conceive—and live.

" I have heard," Miss Carmichael added, " that the ghost has been seen quite recently haunting the site once occupied by the house and grounds, and also the borders of the heath."

And as Miss Carmichael was very emphatic on this last point, I may not unreasonably conclude that the girl of my dreams was the actual ghost of " The Gables."

CHAPTER X

MY VIEWS ON A FUTURE LIFE FOR THE ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE WORLDS

I MENTIONED in one of my former works that I believe many of the figures we pass by in the streets are not men and women like ourselves, but phantasms—phantasms of the living, that is to say, spirit projections of people consciously or unconsciously thinking of being where we see them—phantasms of the dead, and impersonating neutrarians.

Mingling with the crowds in the parks and gliding in and out the trees, I have often seen people with the pallor of corpses ; I have followed them, and they have unaccountably vanished. I believe Hyde Park, particularly the northern side, to be as full of ghosts as any spot in London, and I have heard many strange tales from the outcasts, the tattered and torn brigade, who have slept all night under its trees and bushes. The police are, I believe, expected to clear the Park before locking-up time, and I've no doubt they try to do so, but they cannot possibly look into every nook and cranny in that vast expanse, and there are many in which one could easily hide and defy detection. I have tried the experiment once, and I am not anxious to try it again ; there is no place so terribly depressing, so strangely suggestive of suicide, and hauntings by the most grotesque type of neutrarians, as London's premier park by night.

Some twelve or fifteen years ago, in my nightly rambles there, I noticed that the seat beneath a certain tree, mid-way between the Marble Arch and Lancaster Gate, was rarely occupied, whereas all the other seats in that vicinity were invaded by couples. One evening, the weather being warm and sultry, I went and sat there. I dozed off, and eventually fell into a deep sleep. I dreamed that an old man and a young girl stood under the tree, whispering, and that as I watched them they raised their eyes, and looked in a horribly guilty manner, not at me, but at the space next me, which I perceived, for the first time, was occupied by a tiny child. Moving stealthily forward and holding in their hands an outspread cloth, they crept up behind the child, the cloth descended, and all three vanished. Then something made me gaze up into the branches of the tree, and I saw a large, light, colourless, heavily-lidded eye peering down at me with an expression of the utmost malevolence. It was altogether so baneful, so symbolic of cruelty, malice, and hate that I could only stare back at it in mute astonishment. The whole shape of the tree then seemed to alter, and to become like an enormous dark hand, which, swaying violently to and fro, suddenly dived down and closed over me. I awoke at once, but was so afraid of seeing the eye, that for some minutes I kept my own eyes tightly shut. When I opened them, I saw, bending over me, a very white face, and to my intense relief a voice, unmistakably human, croaked, "No wonder you're scared, sitting here at this time of night by yourself."

The speaker was merely one of the many hundreds of tramps for whom the Park was reception and bedroom combined. His hat was little more than a rim, and his trousers cried shame on the ladies I saw every day with their skirts plastered all over with buttons. His cheeks

were hollow, his eyes preternaturally bright, and his breath full of hunger. Still, he was alive, and anything alive just then was very welcome.

"I never sleep here," he said; "none of us do."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because it's haunted," he said. "You may laugh—so did I years ago, afore I took to this sort of thing. But sleeping out-of-doors all night has taught me more than any politicians, bishops, or schoolmasters know; or any of those fine ladies that swell about in their carriages know; I've seen sights that would make an hangel afraid; I've seen ghosts of all sorts. They're not all like us, neither. Some of them ain't human at all, they're devils. You may laugh when you read about them in them library books, but it's no laughing matter when you see them, as I've seen them, all alone and cold, in some wayside ditch. This tree, I tell yer, is 'aunted—and it's a devil that 'aunts it. Ask my mates, any of them that you'll find sleeping in the parks. There's many of them that 'ave experienced it. They've seen something hiding in the branches, and when they've seen it, they've felt they must either kill themselves or someone else. There's a devil in the tree that tempts one to do all kind of wicked things, and if you take my advice, young man, you'll sit somewhere else."

"I think I will," I said; "and here's something for your warning." I gave him threepence, the only coins I had on me just then, and, overwhelming me with thanks, he shuffled away.

Since that night I have often thought that the poor—the very poor—know far more of the other world or worlds than do the rich, and that they know more—far more—on other points than the rich. The statesman talks of the people and the people's needs, but what does he know of the people and their needs? He rarely, if ever, goes amongst them. Except in electioneering times, I doubt if any Member of Parliament ever goes into the more squalid of our London districts. I have

seen one Member of the House of Lords eating whelks in a tavern in the Limehouse Causeway, but he is an exception. Journalists go there—but the leisured folk—never.

It bores them ; and yet how much they might learn, how much not only of urgent human needs, but of coming storms. They might learn that the East End brews whilst the West End sleeps, and that as surely as the long-talked-of German war cloud—that war cloud they affected to ridicule—has at last burst, so undoubtedly will the war cloud of revolution ; revolution hatched by malcontents of all nationalities in East End doss houses and crowded coffee taverns.

This is no empty prophecy. The cinders of the volcano have been hot for some time—they are now burning hot —and the hour is fast approaching when they will arise mightily in a red conflagration. Are we prepared for it ? It takes a very sound constitution to face a revolution with perfect confidence. Are we sound ? Can any constitution be sound when the rich daily grow richer, and the poor, poorer. Where Art—all that cries out for beauty, real beauty, beauty as it is seen and worshipped by souls uninspired by lucre—is starved to death and crushed, limp and lifeless, by the thumbscrews of a vain, shallow, mercenary mushroom aristocracy on the one hand, and an equally selfish, crude, ignorant, money-grabbing working class on the other. But let me say again it is the East End, the ever watchful, never slumbering East End, that is the thermometer of future events. And why ? Because it is here that the lean, hungry men of letters, who seldom, if ever, get their thoughts transferred to print, are even now threshing out the nation's destiny. Threshing it out, consolidating it, whilst the monied men and women, the present all-powerful nouveau riche—the beer, whiskey and tobacco, peers and peeresses—the lords of the Stock Exchange, Banks and Divorce Courts—those who have made their money out of the sins and follies of the world, or by sweating and usury, are lolling in their soft, upholstered

chairs, smoking luxurious cigars and quaffing liqueurs.

The war has done much: it has aroused patriotism, it has given rise to self-sacrifice, but it has not touched the root of the gangrene, it has not lessened our worship of the dollar. Individualism, as we know it to-day, must collapse, and some better and purer system—a system that does not encourage selfishness—must prevail. The people are dying for change—for some great change that will give them fair play. This is the people's need—the need that you may hear voiced throughout the length and breadth of the squalid East End. "We want a Government that remembers its primary duties," they cry. "A Government that is father to its children, that loves, fosters and protects them. We have never had one yet, but the hour may not be far distant when we shall demand one." This is what the people of leisure might learn, if they visited the haunts I visit; and they might learn more beside. They might learn of another world, a spirit world, such as is never alluded to in the pulpits, with which people in the poorest parts—people who are too poor to pay for beds—are forced to live in contact. Nights in the parks and commons have taught these vagrants more, a thousand times more, than they ever learned in Sunday or County Council Schools. They have seen sights—spirits in the form of man and of beast, of both and of neither—that have revealed to them how closely the other world borders on this, and to what close supervision the inhabitants of the other world subject some of us. They have learned, I say, what no priest or preacher would, or could, teach them, namely, that the hell of spirit-land lies on this earth, and that the worst of all punishments is that of the poor phantasms of the dead, that glides in and out the trees nocturnally, never meeting those it knew and loved, but ever encountering the most terrifying of the spirits that are hostile to man.

Our vagrants know, too, the power of these neutrarians, they know they can adopt any shape, and

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"What gives me the worst fright is a tree . . ."

tempt and goad man on to the committal of any crime, however heinous. They have, moreover, acquired a further knowledge—a knowledge denied and scoffed at by the ministry of all Christian denominations—namely that all forms of animal and vegetable life, all forms of flora and fauna, pass into the superphysical, and live again.

I myself first learned of a tree ghost from an old tramp, who came and sat by my side on a seat on Clapham Common.

"Do I ever see anything strange here at night?" he repeated in answer to my question. "Yes, I do, at times, but what gives me the worst fright is a tree that I sometimes see close to the spot where that man was murdered some ten or twelve years ago. I never saw it before the murder, but a few nights afterwards, as I was passing the spot, I saw a peculiar glimmer of white, and, on getting a bit closer, I found, to my astonishment, that it was a tall, slender white thing with branches just like a tree, only it was not behaving like a tree. Although there was not a breath of wind, it kept lurching with a strange, creaking noise, and I felt it was watching me, watching me furtively, just as if it had eyes, and was bent on doing me all the harm it possibly could. I was so scared, I turned tail, and never ceased running till I had reached home."

"Home!" I said.

"Yes, a clump of bushes near the ditch, where I always turn in of nights. It ain't much of a home, to be sure, but it's the only one I've got, and I can generally count on lying there undisturbed till the morning."

I gave him a few coppers, and he blessed me as if I had given him a fortune.

On Tooting Common I met a Northumberland miner, who had come to London for the first time on a holiday, and, having had his pocket picked, was obliged to spend the night out-of-doors. "Ghosts," he said, when I asked him if he had any experiences with the super-

natural whilst engaged in his underground work. "Ghosts! Yes, but of a nature you don't read about in books. Me and my mates, when working in a drift at night, have heard the blowing of the wind and a mighty rustling of leaves, and have found ourselves surrounded on all sides by numerous trees and ferns that have suddenly risen from the ground and formed a regular forest. They have not resembled any trees you see now-a-days, but what you might fancy existed many thousands of years ago. There has been no colour in them, only a uniform whiteness, and they have shone like phosphorous. We have heard, too, all the noises, such as go on daily in forests above-ground—the humming and buzzing of insects, and the chirping of birds; and shafts and galleries have echoed and re-echoed with the sounds, till you would have thought that those away above us must have heard them, too."

I do not think the miner romanced, for what he said was only a corroboration of what other miners have often told me.

Of course, it is not every mine that is haunted in this way, or every miner that sees such sights, for the Unknown confines its manifestations to the few, but I firmly believe such phenomena do happen, because as I state in my "Byways of Ghostland" (W. Rider & Sons), I have seen several tree ghosts myself. If one form of life possesses a spirit, why should we not assume that other forms of life possess a spirit, too? Why should man have the monopoly of an immaterial self, and alone of all creation continue his identity after physical dissolution? On moral grounds? No! For man, generally speaking, is in no sense superior morally to the so-called beasts around him. He is often the reverse. Oddly enough, we have so long accustomed ourselves to using the term immorality exclusively in reference to our illegal relations with the other sex, that we have come to regard these illegal relations as the only immorality existing. It is a curious error. Immorality comprises

theft, and theft not only comprehends depriving people of their material goods, it comprehends slander and gossip—*i.e.*, depriving people of their character ; sweating—*i.e.*, depriving people of the just rewards of their mental and manual labour ; and bread-snatching,—*i.e.*, depriving people of their only means of existence ; beside many other acts of an equally odious nature. The average drawing-room is invariably the rendezvous of immoral people ; nine out of every ten of the ladies one meets there are robbers—they steal, almost at very breath, someone's good name and reputation, a far worse crime than the purloining of a loaf, for which act of desperation a poor man would be sent to prison, and a hungry dog beaten. In the drawing-room, too, one meets the girl with a few hundred a year, who announces her intention of taking some post—maybe on the stage, or on the staff of some paper, or in a business house, "just to make a little money." A little money at the expense of someone else's life ! For that is what the want of occupation to the person with no private income literally means. We see none of this mean immorality in the animal world. Dogs steal bones from one another, it is true, but they do not lie, and cheat, and intrigue ; nor do they, when they have a sufficiency themselves, snatch away the little that constitutes another person's all.

Animals are accused of being cruel—of barbarously murdering one another, as in the cases of the cat and mouse, the lion and deer, etc. But they rarely kill, saving when they are hungry, and for food man kills, too, in a fashion and with a method which is truly disgusting. By studiously looking after the daily wants of certain animals, such as cows and sheep, and by caring for them when they are ill, man leads them to suppose he is their friend, and they learn to trust him. Vain faith. He is kind to them only to suit his own ends. He out-Judas's Judas, and after nonchalantly accepting their most lavish tributes of affection, he takes them unawares and

kills them, either with a poleaxe, or some other weapon entailing an equally painful and lingering death. Do any animals behave quite so basely ? Besides, there is no cruelty in the animal world—not even the most excruciating suction of the octopus, nor the sharp, agonising bite of the flesh-eating parrot of New Zealand—that can for one moment compare with the coolly planned and leisurely executed horrors of the Spanish Inquisition ; and the tiger, at its worst, is but a tyro in savagery compared with the creature God is said to have made in His own image.

From vices turn to virtues, and pause for a moment in reflection on the many lovable qualities of the dog. Where in man do we find such affection, forgiveness, general amiability, constancy and patience ; and in the case of the horse, such a willingness to labour without any thought of recompense. It makes me positively ill, when I hear hopelessly immoral men and women—gossips, slanderers, breadsnatchers, usurers, sweaters—speak condescendingly of animals—of dogs and horses that are on an infinitely higher moral plane than ever they have been, or ever will be. But moral superiority is not the only superiority that man fallaciously assumes. He lays claim to an intellectual superiority, which is equally fallacious, equally a myth. No one who has ever studied animal and insect life can but have been impressed with the marvels of ingenuity and skill displayed therein. The web of the common garden spider and the nest of the wren, for example, are every whit as wonderful in their way as the architectural works of Inigo Jones or Christopher Wren. On the grounds of a moral and mental inferiority, therefore, the argument of a future life for the human species only, fails. Another argument, an argument advanced by the most bigotted of the religious denominationalists, is " that man only has a conscience, and that conscience which he alone possesses is the only passport to another world. Without conscience there can be no soul, and without soul there can be no

hope of a continuation of life after death." This, of course, is merely assumption, as is nearly all the teaching of the Churches. Conscience, like religion, depends to a very large extent on climate. A man born in the centre of Africa might not think it wrong to do things that would appear appalling to a Plymouth Brother, and vice versa. There is at present no fixed and universal standard of right and wrong, any more than there is a fixed and universal standard of beauty—for as each eye forms its own idea of feminine loveliness, so each heart forms its own conception of honour and dishonour, virtue and vice. We know that this is the case as far as mankind is concerned, and we have nothing beyond assumption to assure us that it is not so throughout the animal and insect world. If the animals have no conception of a moral standard, how is it that they do not destroy one another ? That the instinct to injure people is innate in us is readily proved by the joy nearly all of us take in saying disparaging things of our neighbours. We go so far, and we would undoubtedly go the whole hog and kill those we hate, if something more, perhaps, than the mere fear of hanging did not hold us back. That restraining something is unquestionably the fear of the Future, and it is that fear which I am inclined to think is the origin of what we term our consciences. Were we sure there was no future existence, there would be no moral restraint (it would only be the prospect of legal punishment that would deter us from injuring other people to our heart's content), we should have no consciences ; and if this is applicable to mankind, why is it not applicable to other forms of animal life ?

Is it not feasible to suppose that it is this same fear of the future that acts as a preventive to animals killing one another indiscriminately ? That they do at times rob and kill for other motives than to satisfy their hunger is indisputable, but these exceptional cases prove what I am trying to maintain—that there is some restraining influence that keeps the vast majority highly

moral ; and I see no feasible arguments for not supposing this influence to be a conscience begat by a deep-rooted fear of what may await them on physical dissolution.

And if this applies to the mammals, why not to the whole animal, insect, and vegetable worlds—to everything that has life, for Science has yet to prove that where there is life, there is not also intelligence.

The superior morality of animals to man, then, may be considered as due to their more powerful consciences, and to their stronger fear of the possibility of the superphysical. And why should they have a much stronger fear ? Because, unquestionably, they have a more intimate knowledge of the Unknown than has man. No one who has had much to do with dogs and horses can doubt this. Who that has ridden through woods and jungles, or lonely country roads at night, has not seen their horse suddenly stop and evince every evidence of fear. Though the human eye has seen nothing to account for it, the horse obviously has seen something, and it has only been by dint of the utmost coaxing and petting that the sagacious animal has been persuaded to continue its course. It is the same with dogs. Over and over again I have had dogs with me in houses alleged to be haunted, and they have suddenly manifested symptoms of the greatest, the most uncontrollable fear. I have endeavoured to pacify them, to urge them to follow me, but it has been in vain ; though obedient and fearless as a rule, they have suddenly become the most disobedient and incorrigible of cowards. Why ? Because I am certain they have seen and heard things which, for some unaccountable reason, have been held back from me.

If knowledge, then, of another life is any plea for the bestowal of an unperishable spirit, animals should live again even more surely than man. And so also should the vegetable world, for I have myself seen trees violently agitated, as if with paroxysms of the most sublime terror, before the advent of superphysical phenomena.

And stronger than any of these arguments is that of the ghosts themselves. There are innumerable and well-authenticated cases of hauntings by the phantasms of dogs, horses, birds, insects, and trees, and it is, perhaps, chiefly through these hauntings that we can disprove the theory that man possesses a monopoly of the immaterial planes; a theory which, were it not for his insufferable egotism and conceit, he would never have advanced.

CHAPTER XI

A HAUNTING IN REGENT'S PARK, AND MY FURTHER VIEWS WITH REGARD TO SPIRITUALISM

BEFORE concluding my experiences in the parks and commons of London, I will cite one other case, a case which serves to illustrate the theme I have just been discussing.

I was visiting the Zoological Gardens in Regent's Park, one day in the summer of 1898, and was so struck with the look of yearning in the eyes of one of the lions, the desperate look of yearning to have just five minutes' gambol on the sunny lawn outside, five minutes in which to stretch its poor, cramped-up limbs, and sniff, perhaps for the first time, the fine fresh air of freedom, that I could not refrain from mentioning what was passing in my mind to a white-haired old man and a plainly dressed young woman, who were standing near.

"Yes, sir," the old man said. "It does seem hard on these huge animals to be confined within the limits of such a very small space and to have to pace up and down these little boxes, tantalised by the sight of other creatures enjoying the privileges that are denied to them. It is worse treatment than any meted out to criminals; in fact, the biggest ruffian in jail does not suffer in anything like the same degree as these animals. They have one thing to be thankful for, however—life cannot last

for ever. Death will be their kindest friend. It is the rich man's purgatory, but it is Paradise for all these creatures as well as for the poor man."

"You believe in another world, then?" I remarked.

"Believe in another world?" he answered sharply, "why, of course I do. I have seen far too much of it to do otherwise, haven't I, Minnie?"

"Yes, Grandad," the girl said simply.

"We both have, Minnie and I," the old man went on.

"Spirits?" I enquired.

"Yes, spirits. Ghosts, if you like," he said.

"Tell me. I'm not one of the scoffers," I pleaded.

He looked at me searchingly, and then said: "I used to be a keeper here many years ago. I was devoted to the animals, and when they died, I invariably saw their ghosts. So did some of the other keepers. Now don't run away with the idea that the Gardens are haunted, sir. As far as I know, they are not. It was only to us who had so much to do with them when they were alive that the spirits of these animals appeared. I remember one instance in particu ar, about twelve years ago, just before I left the Zoo. A young lion came here from East Africa. It wouldn't let any of the keepers go near it excepting myself, and it was generally regarded as having a very uncertain temper. But I never found it so. I knew that the reason of its restlessness was its hatred of confinement. I knew it hated its cage, and I used to do all I could to comfort it. There was a sort of mutual understanding between us. When it saw me looking a bit anxious and worried, for my wife was often ill, it used to come and rub its great head against me, as if to cheer me up, and when I saw it looking more than usually dejected, I used to stop and talk to it for a longer time than I talked to any one of the other animals. Well, one day it fell ill, caught a chill, so we thought, and evinced a strong dislike to its food. I discussed its case with the other keepers, and they agreed there was nothing to be alarmed about, as it was young and to all appearances

healthy. We all thought it would be well again in a few days. I had gone home as usual one night, and was sitting in the kitchen reading the evening paper, when something came over me that I must go for a walk. I told Minnie, who was a little girl then, not more than nine or ten years of age, and she begged her mother to let her go with me. We started off with the intention of going to the Caledonian Road, as Minnie liked looking at the shops there, but we hadn't gone far before Minnie suddenly exclaimed, 'Grandad, let's go to Regent's Park.' 'Regent's Park,' I ejaculated; 'whatever do you want to go there for at this time of night!' 'I don't know,' she said, 'but I feel I must.' 'Well now,' I replied, 'that's odd, because the very same feeling has come over me.'

"We struck off down Crowndale Road—I was living in the neighbourhood of the St. Pancras Road then—and got to Gloucester Gate just about dusk. We had passed through, and were walking along the Broad Walk by the side of the Zoo, when Minnie suddenly caught hold of my arm, and said, 'Look, Grandad!' I followed the direction of her gaze, and there coming straight towards us from the Zoo walls was a lion. I can tell you it gave me a jump, as I naturally thought one of the animals had escaped. It aimed straight for us, and upon its getting close to I recognised it at once—it was the young lion that had been taken ill. To my astonishment, however, there was nothing of the invalid about it now. The expression in its eyes was one of infinite happiness. It seemed to say, 'I have attained my ideal; I am out in the open, in the sweet, fresh air, and the wide darkness of the fast approaching night.' It came right up to us, and I stretched out my hand to touch it, wondering what the passers-by would do when they saw it, and how on earth we should get it back into the gardens. It bitterly grieved me to think it would have to lose its freedom. I stretched out my hand, I say, to touch it, and to my surprise my fingers encountered nothing—the lion had

vanished. I then realised what Minnie had known all along—that what we had seen was a ghost. A ghost, and yet it had appeared to me so absolutely real and life-like."

"How did you know it was a ghost?" I enquired of the young woman.

"By the curious kind of light that seemed to emanate from all over its body," she replied. "I can only describe it as a kind of glow, something like that of a glow-worm. It was not a bit natural."

"But you saw the figure distinctly?"

"Yes," she responded, "very distinctly, and I wasn't the least bit afraid."

"Let me tell you the sequel, sir," the old man interrupted. "On my arrival at the Zoo in the morning, one of the men came running up to me. 'It's dead!' he said. 'Dead!' I cried. 'Who's dead?' 'Why, that young lion of yours,' was the reply; 'it died at eight o'clock last night.'

"And, sure enough, when I went into the lion-house, there was the animal lying stretched out at full length in its cage—dead. It had died at eight o'clock, which was the exact time we had seen it in the park."

. . . . . .

And now to pursue the thread of my own life, which must of necessity run through this volume. While I was teaching at Blackheath, I not only completed my first novel, "For Satan's Sake," but studied for the stage at the Henry Neville Studio in Oxford Street. I shall never forget with what joy, when my duties with the spoilt and tiresome boys were over, I exchanged the terrible monotony of the schoolroom for the delightful and interesting atmosphere of the Studio. Henry Neville did not teach there himself, but periodically came to watch and help us with his criticisms, which were always as kindly and instructive as they were utterly free from pomposity and egotism. Easy and natural himself, he tried to infuse something of his spirit into us,

and with many of us, I believe, he succeeded ; for even those who did not believe that acting could be taught, were bound to admit that the pupils of Henry Neville were singularly free from the staginess almost always seen in amateurs, and sometimes in professionals as well.

Henry Neville's brother, Fred Gartside, who gave me my first lesson in elocution—an abler or more persevering instructor could not have been found—left off teaching at the Studio soon after I joined. Mr. G. R. Foss took his place, and is, I believe, still at the head of it.

I have always looked upon G. R. Foss as one of the greatest stage geniuses I have ever met. He is that rarest of all individuals—the born actor—the man who can perform almost any *rôle* with equal success. He is the ideal stage manager, a past master in the knowledge of all the technicalities adhering to the theatre, and the possessor of a never-ceasing flow of wit and good humour.

Among the pupils who were at the Studio with me, several have performed in London. I toured with George Desmond, who was quite recently playing in the West End, and I met Miss Yvonne Orchardson again, some two or more years ago, when she was also acting in a London theatre, whilst I constantly see that charming and talented old Nevillite, Miss Lilian North, who delights London audiences with her sweetly told stories and good recitations. Apart from many other personal attractions, Miss North has the most beautiful hands ; the fingers are long and tapering and the nails exquisitely shaped. It is the rarest combination of the psychic and dramatic hand, and such as I have very seldom seen saving among Orientals.

If I have spoken somewhat extravagantly of the Neville Studio, its instructors and pupils, it is only what I genuinely feel, and I repeat, again, that the hours there were some of the most delightful I have ever experienced. When I had completed my course of instruction, I went on tour in " A Night Out." I then came back to London and remained nearly a year in

Town, writing in the day-time and playing in one or other of the suburbs in the evening. I lived, for the most part, in St. James' Road, Brixton, where I wrote my second and third books, both novels, and entitled respectively " The Unknown Depths " and " Dinevah the Beautiful."

" The Unknown Depths," founded to a large extent upon my own life, introduces the subject of Spiritualism, or, as it is now more often termed, Spiritism, and, whilst I was engaged on it, I attended many séances.

I am often asked to express an opinion on Spiritualism.

I am very averse from any attempt to invoke spirits, either through the aid of spells or mediums, by table-turning, or by automatic writing. As I have already said, I believe that genuine spirits do occasionally manifest themselves at séances, but that, when they do, the medium is quite as surprised at the manifestation as the sitters, and in no greater a degree, perhaps, responsible for it. I believe the spirit I have named neutrarian is the only type of spirit that takes advantage of a séance, that is to say, takes advantage of the peculiar magnetic atmosphere created at a séance. It adopts the form, or attributes, of some relative or friend of one of the sitters, and, thus disguised, manifests itself merely for the sake of deceiving and misleading over-credulous men and women. But unfortunately these spirits do not stop at mere mischief. Having once gained a footing, so to speak, they can attach themselves to certain people, and by tormenting them continually, drive them in the end to madness and suicide.

In addition to the danger of attracting undesirable neutrarians at séances, there is the risk of being duped by mediums. I have met a good many professional mediums—so-called clairvoyants, aura tellers, psychometrists, materialising mediums, and the like, and none of them have convinced me that they can do all that they profess to do. Besides, even if they could, the mere suggestion that one's spirit friend or relative is tapping

on a wall or blowing through a trumpet, presumably to satisfy the curiosity of a number of strangers, and incidentally to fill the coffers of an illiterate man or woman, only fills one with disgust. If any departed friends of mine wish to visit me, I am sure they could do so without the assistance of a so-called medium and all their paltry paraphernalia. The usual argument in defence of these mediums is that some well-known scientific man believes in them. " If Sir somebody or other says I am genuine," the clairvoyant exclaims, " then I am genuine, and you've no right in the world to doubt me."

The medium is wrong. I have every right. Scientists may be very shrewd, perhaps infallible in their own legitimate calling, but, outside it, their opinion need carry no more weight than mine, or yours, or anyone else's.

It by no means follows that because a man is a Professor of Physics he is also a great student of character. Poring over chemicals or figures all day is a very poor training for reading the human mind. An actor is a far more able exponent of psychology than any chemist or mathematician, and this being so, it is the actor who should play a prominent part in psychical research and not the scientist. If a veteran actor were to say to me, "Look here, I have watched that woman very carefully when she was supposed to go into a trance, and to speak in an entirely different voice from her own, and I am convinced she is merely acting," I should be inclined to believe him. In his wide experience of facial expression, posing, and assumed voices, it would be comparatively easy for him to tell whether the medium was shamming or not. A clever actress can disguise her voice effectually, and no one would know it. She can speak with a French accent one moment and broad cockney the next, and so naturally that few people would know she was the same person. That is why, when I have listened to a clairvoyant, in an alleged trance, speaking in the voice of

Tommy Jones or some other presumed obsessing spirit, I have been unmoved. There are a dozen actresses of my acquaintance who could easily do the same. But someone exclaims, "She actually spoke in Russian, a language she knows nothing about." "How do you know she is unacquainted with Russian?" is my answer; no one can possibly tell that but herself. She has most likely acquired a smattering of it, simply for this purpose. What could be easier? I have a smattering of a good many languages, but I could easily stimulate complete ignorance of any one or all of them; I repeat, no one knows but ourselves how much we have seen, and read, and heard, where we have been, and what we have studied, and, if we are sufficiently clever, we can let the outside world know just as much as we want it to know and no more. Some mediums are said to act in one manner when they are obsessed, and in an entirely different manner when in their normal condition. What futile rubbish! Who knows when they are in their normal condition, or what their normal condition really is? Most of us are complex. I myself have several distinct personalities—and I defy anyone to enumerate them—any one of which might be equally my true, my normal self. Moreover, I might go into a trance, speak with the voice of a Spaniard, and behave like a Red Indian, and those who saw me would think me obsessed. Yet they might easily be mistaken. I might have secretly acquired a smattering of Spanish, and one of my hobbies might be that of imitating, in private, the ways and habits of a Sioux or Crow Foot.

I know a clergyman who attracts large congregations by reason of his eloquence and apparent piety, and who is believed in his parish to be most moral and sincere. I also know him to spend several evenings a week in an East End tavern, singing ribald songs and playing poker. Which is his true self, which his normal condition? His congregation believe him to be one thing, his East End

cronies another, and he is apparently quite as much at home in the church as he is in the tavern.

Then, apart from the question of personalities, I believe another evidence of trickery lies in the non-usefulness of any of the communications alleged to be made by the spirits. If professional mediums could receive bona fide communications from the other world, I am quite sure that they would acquire some knowledge of a practical nature, and that we should, in consequence, soon see them all multi-millionaires. That they are not all Vanderbilts and Rothschilds is, I think, a very strong argument that their alleged spirit friends have told them nothing.

And that is what it all amounts to—nothing. Automatic writing, table-turning, and trances have taught us absolutely nothing concerning either this or the other world, and the messages purporting to come from the spirits have hitherto, at all events, consisted of trivialities and commonplaces of such an unedifying nature that we cannot dissociate them from factory girls and nursemaids.

Our friends on the other side, who have passed through the valley of the shadow of death, might reasonably be expected to know something that we do not; and yet not even the smallest fragment of their knowledge has so far been transmitted to us through any of the channels resorted to by Spiritualists. Neither, as far as I know, have the police benefited by any information imparted to them by mediums or automatic writers. On the other hand, although the Unknown has refused to confide to those claiming to be its chosen few any messages that would right the wrong, bona fide phantasms of the dead have certainly been known to appear spontaneously, to other than professional mediums, with this intent.

. . . . . .

I am acquainted with an old lady, who tells me that she often talks with Charles Dickens, Napoleon Bonaparte, Cardinal Newman and other eminents. I

have enquired how, and she has reluctantly admitted that the spirits of these eminents come to her at a séance conducted by a professional medium, who, of course, is paid very liberally for her services. The medium, I gather, sits behind a screen, where she is supposed to wait, until she is obsessed. When everything is ready, she glides out, and in a voice purporting to be that of Napoleon, or of someone equally distinguished, she converses with this foolish and conceited old lady. It seems incredible that anyone outside a lunatic asylum could believe that the spirits of such great men as Napoleon, Newman and Dickens should take the trouble to obsess a medium, in order to chat with some nonentity, who is neither extraordinarily clever nor particularly interesting. And yet there are dozens of people, apart from the old lady I have mentioned, who know so little of genius and eminence, and even ordinary talent, as to believe this incongruous happening to be possible. I, myself, have heard a Spiritualist, who lays down the laws respecting the Unknown, as if he were actually the Creator, declare that, whenever he lectures, the hall is full to overflowing with spirits. Amongst them, he says, are the shades of Charles Dickens—there must be at least a hundred shades of Dickens, for there is hardly a spiritualistic meeting or séance that I hear of at which Dickens is not alleged to be present—Sir Isaac Newton and Napoleon. (Soon, perhaps, there will be the Kaiser and the Crown Prince. I hope so.)

Family séances are, of course, quite another matter. I have not the least doubt that when the friends and relatives of some departed person meet together, and, concentrating very earnestly on that dead one being present, create the right magnetic atmosphere, that sometimes a real spirit manifestation does take place, and the phantasm of the deceased, or what at any rate purports to be the phantasm of the deceased, does actually appear.

The phenomenon may possibly be a neutrarian—for,

of course, there is always that risk—or it may really be the soul, spirit, or whatever else we like to call it, of the dead person. And here let me urge again, the utter absurdity of attempting to dogmatise on the Unknown. At one time it was the parson, who unfolded to us, with all the sageness of one who had been there, the mysteries of the other world. He not only told us what we must do and not do in order to ascend to Heaven, but he went a step further: he told us what Heaven was like, and what actually was taking place there. The parson of to-day, however, does not seem quite so sure of his knowledge on these points as he was formerly, and his statements have become far less assertive; indeed, they have become somewhat tentative. It is the Occultist now who dictates. He talks with an air of absolute authority of Astral Planes, Elementaries, Elementals, vitalised shells, Karmas, and goodness knows what besides, and uses such a variety of high-falutin' terms, that our brains at last become bewildered, and we begin to wonder with Goldsmith how it is possible that one small head can carry all he knows. But when we have boiled it all down, when we have analysed his dissertation, we find that it is, in the last resort, merely a repetition of all the old doctrines with which we have been familiar from our earliest youth. The only difference is that our Occultist, chiefly by discarding the old names of dogmas, and adopting a superfluity of new ones, has made of these same doctrines a hotch-potch of such rare quality, that few—if indeed any—of us can digest it.

CHAPTER XII

A HAUNTED MINE IN WALES

WHILE I was at Brixton, paying daily visits to various well-known theatrical agencies in search of work, I ran across the manager of a fit-up company, who wanted a man of about my age and build to play second lead in a melodrama. I closed with his offer, and for the next four weeks, which was as long as his funds held out, I paid three night visits to various towns in Wales, winding up at Llandudno, no better off financially than when I commenced, and having to pay my own fare back to London.

If, however, my excursion into Wales was unprofitable from the monetary standpoint, it was by no means lacking in other respects, for, apart from the experience I gained from playing four entirely different parts a night, with two electric changes, I came across several interesting cases of hauntings.

One of my landladies, a kindly old soul to whom I had chatted about ghosts, introduced me to an old man, Clem Morgan, whom she said had had a curious experience in one of the neighbouring mines. The incident had taken place some fifty years ago, shortly after a dreadful explosion, whereby many scores of the miners had been killed and injured. I will narrate the experience—

merely altering the wording of it here and there—just as Clem Morgan narrated it to me :—

" A thousand feet down, close to the site of a great tragedy that had thrilled the whole country to the very core, my mate and I were at work. Pick, pick, pick ; shovel, shovel, shovel ; the sound of our instruments must have been heard hundreds of yards away.

" ' George,' I said suddenly, leaving off work, ' was it like this afore the accident ? '

" ' Like what ? ' George grunted. He was a middle-aged man with a black, stubby beard, and arms like the gnarled and knotted branches of an oak. ' Like what ? '

" ' Why, as lonely as this ? Were you working with just one other man, or were you with the rest of the gang ? '

" ' With one other,' George responded, ' and just as soft as you. Why can't you let the matter drop ? I'm sick to death of hearing about it.'

" ' It's a marvel to me how you escaped,' I went on ; ' whereabouts were you ? '

" ' Just where we are now,' George growled, ' and that's all I'll tell you, so you'd best shut up ! '

" ' And you went up them steps with all the hell of the explosion ringing around you ? ' I observed, advancing to the edge of the black shaft close to where we were working, and looking at the slender wooden ladder leading up to the dark vault above. ' It's a wonder to me you didn't miss your footing in your hurry, and fall. I should have done.'

" ' I've no doubt you would,' George sneered, ' but I'm no tenderfoot ; I was at this game when you were in your cradle, which you never ought to have left.'

" ' How many feet down is it ? ' I went on, peering below me, much fascinated.

" ' Fourteen fathoms. We don't reckon by feet here. Done with that way of doing things in the schoolroom.'

" ' So that you would be killed outright, if you fell ? '

" ' Try and see,' George jeered.

" ' It's my brother I was thinking of, not myself,' I observed. ' Where was he exactly, when the explosion took place ? '

" ' How can I say, boy,' George replied, irritably. ' I don't know where half the folk are.'

" ' They told me he was in an adit leading into the main shaft.'

" ' He may have been, for all I know—and for all I care,' George answered gruffly.

" ' Do you suppose it was here he was working ? ' I said, after a moment or two's pause, during which I again went to the shaft and peered down.

" ' This is not the only adit on the main,' George growled. ' He wasn't here—leastways not when I was.'

" ' I heard he was with a man he unintentionally injured, and who ever after bore him a grudge.'

" ' Oh, oh ! ' George exclaimed ; ' so you know as much as that, do you ? And what, pray, was this man like ? '

" ' I couldn't say,' I replied, ' excepting that he was much older than Dick, and very ugly.'

" ' A description that would fit in with dozens down here. If he was working with your brother, and your brother was killed, the odds are he was killed too.'

" ' You think so ? '

" ' It seems reasonable enough, don't it ? ' George said.

" ' He might have escaped like you did.'

" ' He might,' George laughed, ' just in the same way as pigs might fly. Supposing you get on with your work and let me do the same.'

" ' I had a queer dream about that man,' I went on.

" ' Dreams ! Pooh ! Who believes in dreams ! ' George said. ' What was it ? '

" ' Why, I dreamed he had something to do with Dick's death and with the accident.'

" ' You had better tell the Inspector,' George sneered. ' And maybe he'll alter his verdict. You seem to have

been very fond of this brother of yours. You've done nothing but carp about him all the morning.'

"'I was,' I replied. 'So were we all. He kept the home going for the last six years.'

"'Kept the home going! Why, where was you?'

"'At College, studying for a teacher. I gave it up after his death.'

"'A schoolmaster! Well, I'm blowed. Then you didn't see much of Dick?'

"'Only in the holidays.'

"'And who told you about this fellow who was supposed to have had a spite against him?'

"'Mother.'

"'It was your mother, was it? Only hearsay evidence after all. Well, they're both dead, anyhow—good and bad, and bad and good—all went together—in a moment, boy! What do they call you?'

"'Clem.'

"'Well, Clem, get on with your shovelling for mercy's sake. I've had enough of talking to last me to the end of the week.'

"I took up my spade, and for the next hour there were no other sounds but the steady, mechanical pick, pick, pick, and scrape, scrape, scrape. Every now and then George sprang aside, there was a crash, and a huge block of coal fell on the rocky floor, mid a blinding shower of dust. A fraction of a second later, and George would have been under it—his head a jelly. Yet the narrowness of his escape did not seem to affect him; he treated it with the utmost indifference, and, wiping away the smuts from his eyes, took up his pick and resumed his hitting. I regarded him in silent wonder. When the dinner-hour arrived, I groped my way to one of the big galleries—the idea of eating alone with George did not appeal to me—and, an hour later, I set out on my way back.

"A terrible sense of isolation hung over that part of the mine whither I bent my steps. It was so far away

from the other adits—so tremendously deep down—so alarmingly dark, so sepulchrally silent. Up above, in the fields, woods, valleys, even far away in the primitive parts of the world, one is never quite alone, for the voice of Nature makes itself heard in the birds and insects. One knows one is in the midst of life. But here !—here in the bowels of the earth, encased in the dead vegetation of a long-forgotten world, there is absolute, all paramount stillness—a thousand times stiller than the stillness of a closed sepulchre. As I pressed on, the crunching of my feet on the scattered fragments of coal awoke the echoes of the galleries, and I paused every now and then to listen in awe to the long reverberating echoes as they rolled round and round me. Once, I nearly slipped ; another foot, and I would have plunged into a sable labyrinth, the cold draught from which wound itself round me and choked the air in my lungs.

" I drew back in horror, and clinging to the knobbly surface of the black wall by my side, pressed frantically forward. God, supposing I should ever lose my way down here—be left behind when all the men went home —what would become of me ? The perspiration rose on my forehead at the bare idea of it. Presently, to my relief, the sound of picking fell on my ears, and an abrupt turn of the passage brought me within sight of George, who had already recommenced work. I hastened to his side, and, picking up my shovel, began to make a neat stack of the rapidly accumulating chunks.

" ' George,' I said, after an emphatic silence, ' why didn't you tell me it was you who was working along with Dick ? '

" ' So you've been asking questions, have you ? ' George growled, without, however, showing the slightest inclination to leave off working. ' Who told you ? '

" ' Jim and Harry Peters.'

" ' Well, and what of it ? '

" ' But why didn't you say so, when I asked you ? '

"'What odds if I had, it wouldn't have done you any good.'

"'Did you have a quarrel with him?'

"'Did the boys tell you I had? Because if so, it's no use my saying anything.'

"'But what do you say?'

"'No! Dick and me never had no quarrel.'

"'Is that true?'

"'Gospel.'

"After this there was another silence unbroken save by the monotonous handling of the implements. Then I suddenly uttered an ejaculation and pointed at my cap. It was lying on the ground, some few feet from where we were working, close beneath a projecting block of coal, and it was moving—moving as if it were being violently agitated by something inside it.

"'What is it?' I demanded.

"'What is what?' George growled, resting for a moment on the handle of his pick.

"'Why, that!' I said, pointing to his cap. 'What makes it move like that?'

"'The wind, of course,' George said.

"'There's not enough draught for that. See!' I placed a piece of paper on the ground within an inch or two of the cap, and it remained perfectly still. 'Something must be underneath it.' I picked the cap up, there was nothing there. 'What do you think of it now?' I asked.

"George made no reply. He turned round, so that I could not see his face, and plied his pick vigorously. After a few minutes I stopped work again.

"'George,' I cried, 'what's the matter with your coat? Look! It's doing just as your cap did.'

"George threw down his pick with an oath.

"'What do you want to keep worrying me for?' he said. 'What's wrong now?'

"'Why, your coat! Look! it's moving—rising up

and down as if the wind were blowing it—and there's not an atom of draught.'

"'It's your fancy,' George said hoarsely. 'The coat's not moving.'

"'What,' I cried, 'do you mean to say you can't see it moving?'

"'No,' George replied. 'It's not, I tell you.' And picking up his tool he set to work again, even more vigorously than before.

"Some minutes later I again stopped. 'Heavens!' I exclaimed. 'Look at my lamp! It's burning blue! What makes it do that?'

"George paused—his pick shoulder high—and looked round. 'Nonsense,' he said savagely. 'You are——' Then he left off and his jaws dropped. 'It must be some chemical in it,' he stammered. 'Let the damned thing be; it'll soon right itself.'

"'This is a strange place, George!' I said slowly.

"'Why strange?' George snapped.

"'Well, first of all there was my cap, then your coat, and now the lantern—all doing something queer. Have you ever known the likes of it before?'

"'Often,' George muttered. 'Scores of times. Funny things is always happening below ground; you'll get used to them in time.'

"'And yet you look a bit scared.'

"'Do I?' George grunted. 'Well, I'm not. By ——, I'm not. You can't always judge by looks, you know.' And, raising his pick, he attacked the coal furiously.

"The afternoon was now waning. Outside, away on the top, where the only roof was the heavens, the sun had sunk to the level of the pine-trees, from whose straight and gently-swaying bodies the grotesque shadows of the night were beginning to steal. It is a peculiarity of the mines that, however deep down they may be, they yet feel the influence of time, and the departure of the sunlight from above creates an immediate increase in the gloom below.

" On this afternoon in particular I felt the change acutely. A darkness, that did not seem to be merely the darkness due to time, stole down the pit's mouth and permeated adits, shafts, galleries—everywhere and everything.

" My light was still burning blue, but beyond it, down in the great, gaping chasm, not ten feet from him, and away along the narrow, winding passage separating me from the rest of the gang, all was black—a denser black than I had conceived possible. I was staring around, too fascinated to go on with my work, when something icy cold gripped my fingers, and, looking down, I saw a big, white hand lying on the top of mine. I gave a yell and dropped my shovel—whereupon the hand vanished.

" ' What's the matter now, curse you ! ' George said angrily. ' If you keep on hindering me like this, I'll tell the overseer. See if I don't.'

" ' The place is haunted,' I gasped. ' A hand caught hold of mine just now.'

" ' A hand ! Rot. What next ? ' And George forced a laugh.

" ' I'm certain it was a hand,' I said, ' and it had a ring on like my brother Dick's.'

" ' You've got Dick on the brain, which is only natural, seeing that you was fond of him, and he only just dead. In a few days' time you will get over it and laugh at your present fears. There's no hands here but yours and mine, lad ! '

" ' Aren't there ? ' I said quietly. ' Then what is that just below yours on the pick.'

" George looked down. Instead of two hands—his own two hands—on the pick, there were three, and the third was white and luminous. With a shriek, George dropped the pick, and sprang away from it, as if it had been a serpent.

" ' Do you believe me now ? ' I remarked. ' If that wasn't Dick's hand, I've never seen it. Besides, I could

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"My God! There's Dick! He's just behind you"

swear to his ring among a thousand. Have you noticed how dark it has been getting ? '

" ' I've noticed nothing,' George muttered, picking up his tool. ' It's all your talk that has done it—you've upset my nerves.' He raised his pick and began to work again, but his hands shook so much he struck his leg and dropped the implement with a cry of pain.

" ' It's nothing,' he growled, as I sprang to his side ; ' only the skin grazed. But I reckon I'll sit down a bit—I'm all of a tremble.'

" He had moved nearer to the edge of the pit, and was about to sit down with his back towards it, when I cried, ' My God ! There's Dick ! He's just behind you. He's pointing at you, George. I see it all now ! George, you devil—you murdered him ! '

" George looked round—and there, bending over him, was a tall figure, with a strangely white face. He threw out his hands to keep the figure off, and, as he did so, he slipped, and fell, with one loud yell of terror, into the pit. I heard him strike the side of the great abyss once—then thud—that was all !

" Sick at heart, I reeled back to the safety of the niche where we had been working, and, as I did so, my eyes fell on the lamp—the flame was now white and normal.

" A rescue party that went in search of George found him in a dying condition at the bottom of the shaft. The fact that he was not killed outright was due to his having fallen in a foot or two of mud and water, which had somewhat broken the force of the concussion. He was fatally injured, but he lingered just long enough to confess that he, and he only, was to blame for the recent disaster. He had had a violent quarrel with Dick, whom he had hated, and, when Dick's back was turned, he had struck him over the head with his pick and killed him. Seized with horror, he then dragged Dick's body into the passage, and, in order to minimise the risk of discovery, had saturated it with paraffin and set fire to it.

He had had just time enough to reach the ladder leading up from the shaft, and climb up it, before the explosion had taken place."

. . . . . .

The Welsh miners are at times magnanimous, and on this occasion they agreed to keep George's crime a secret. To give publicity to the affair, they argued, would not give them back the relatives they had lost, and would only do harm to the dead man's widow and family, who were left almost penniless. Thus the matter ended, and to the outside world the cause of the explosion remained, as before, a mystery.

Of course, it may be said of this case that it has no great value from the evidental point of view, no one having witnessed the ghostly happening but Morgan and the man who was subsequently killed. This may be. At the same time much depends upon the character of a witness, and the evidence of one man, who is reliable, is surely worth more than the evidence of several men who are not reliable.

Morgan told his story in a simple, straightforward manner, and I believed him.

CHAPTER XIII

THE POOL IN WALES THAT LURES PEOPLE TO DEATH

I THINK there is very little doubt that two of the mediums through which the occult forces " get at " humanity are colour and locality. Red, for example, being the colour of blood, is made the medium for instilling thoughts of murder ; green, in a similar manner, is used to suggest suicide by drowning ; yellow suggests madness ; pink—vice of the most alluring and attractive nature ; and so on, until, by a careful study of human crimes in their relation to colour, one might tabulate a complete list.

And so with localities. Certain spots attract certain types of spirits, and these, in turn, suggest certain thoughts, some beautiful and some the reverse.

I was still in North Wales, when, a week or so before the expiration of the tour, I did a day's tramping on the hills, and, being caught in a heavy rain-storm, I had to take shelter under one of those low stone walls with which the whole country-side is intersected. The afternoon was drawing to a close, and the fading light made me a bit anxious as to how I should find my way back to my lodgings. As I was crouching there, praying to heaven that the storm would soon cease, so that I could continue my way, I suddenly heard a loud cry, as of someone in distress, and, on its being repeated, I scrambled up and hastened in the direction of the sounds

About a hundred yards further on there was a break in the wall, and I caught the glimmer of water. It was one of those roadside pools, not uncommon in Wales, and usually of great depth. As I drew nearer, I saw it was fringed on the far side by a cluster of tall pines, that creaked and groaned dismally as the strong west wind drove volumes of water through their bowed branches.

I was noticing all this, when the form of a man in a mackintosh rose from the gorze close by my side, and, thrusting his head forward so that I could not see his face, walked with great swinging strides towards the pool. I thought this rather queer, but I thought it still queerer when the cries I had heard before broke out again with increased violence, unmistakably this time from the trees, and the man, breaking into a run, rushed up to the margin of the pool, where he abruptly disappeared.

I was close behind him at the time, and am positive he did not enter the water. His whole body seemed to melt away as he stood on the bank. What became of him I could not say, I only know he vanished. The incident so unnerved me that it was only with a considerable effort of mind I went on. I threaded my way through the trees, and looked everywhere, but there was no one about and nothing whatever, as far as I could see, to account for the sounds. I looked at the water: it was inky black, and there was something sinister about it, something that strangely suggested to me, that away down in its cold, still depths was life—some peculiar, venomous, repellant living thing that was watching me, and longing to entwine its arms round me, and drag me ruthlessly down. I was appalled. The apparent loneliness of the spot was frightful, and, as I tore myself away and renewed my journey home, I fancied I heard laughter—laughter in which all the trees seemed to join in chorus. On arriving at my rooms, I enquired about the pool, and my landlady informed me it bore a very evil reputation. Several people had been

found drowned there, and no one would go near it after dark. This stimulated me to make further enquiries. I came across one or two men who testified to having heard cries there, and one old woman, who declared she had seen a curious figure, half human and half animal, vanish in the pine trees ; but I could get nothing in the way of details for some months, not until I had returned to London, when, quite by chance and under rather extraordinary circumstances, I was introduced to a man, long since dead, who many years before had had a somewhat harrowing experience there. The gist of what he narrated to me was as follows :—

" Philip Delaney was a member of the London Stock Exchange, and at nine-thirty one August evening was sitting before the empty grate in his study, smoking. Though not naturally a pessimist, his thoughts were at that moment excessively gloomy ; business during the past few years had been steadily getting worse and worse, and it now seemed as if the day of general stagnation must be very near at hand. From an average of fifteen hundred a year his income had fallen to less than eight hundred. Consequently, he could not as usual take his holiday abroad ; he could only just afford to send his wife and children to Hastings, where he might possibly be able to join them for week-ends. As a fitting accompaniment to his thoughts, the weather was vile, cold and wet—eternally wet. He could hear the raindrops beating against the glass, and falling on the window-sill with an incessant, wearying and worrying patter. He was too depressed to read, it was too early to sleep, he could only sit and think, everlastingly think. Indeed, he was deeply engaged in thought—thought in which two, and two and a half percentages were paramount—when, hearing someone cough, he turned sharply round. No one was there.

" This was odd. He could have sworn the sound came from just behind him. With his eyes focussed on the door, he listened. The cough was repeated, foot-

steps accompanied it, and from out of the wall stepped the figure of a man. Philip Delaney gasped in astonishment. He recognised the figure at once. It was Markham Davidson, a very old friend of his, the author of several well-known works on Metaphysics and Psychology. There was nothing peculiar about him—features, complexion, expression, clothes, and walk were all perfectly natural. They belonged to the Markham Davidson he knew, but whom he had not seen for ages. And yet, how, if he were flesh and blood, had he passed through several inches of solid brick and mortar ? How ? Unquestionably he could not have done so, unless—well, unless he had suddenly acquired superphysical properties, and projected his immaterial body after the manner of one of the phantasms about which he was so fond of writing. Walking across the room with a quick tread, the figure displayed certain mannerisms—a forward poke of the head, a prematurely old stoop of the shoulders, and a bend of the arms—unmistakably those of Davidson. Delaney noted, too, that Markham looked remarkably well—his cheeks were ruddy and full, his eyes were bright, his movements full of energy. In one hand he carried a stamped envelope, and in the other an umbrella, with which he tapped the ground vigorously as he walked. He moved in a straight line without looking to the right or left, and, stepping into the wall a few feet from the window, disappeared before Delaney could utter a sound.

" As the whole occurrence had occupied so short a space of time—three or four seconds at the most—Delaney tried hard to persuade himself that the phenomena was an hallucination, but, try as he would, he could not bring himself to believe that what he had seen was entirely subjective. There on the wall was the very spot where the figure had emerged, and there, exactly opposite, the very spot through which it had vanished. No hallucination, he argued, could have

been so vivid, nor could it have embraced so many graphic and minute details. Details! Yes, crowds of details. He remembered them all distinctly, especially the tie. There was a redness about it—a very peculiar redness he did not recollect seeing in any other tie. It impressed him greatly, and he could not eradicate it from his mind.

"He noticed the envelope, too, not so much because it was addressed to P. Delaney, Esq., as because it was white, startlingly white, whilst the stamp was the same very pronounced red as the tie. Long after the figure had gone, Philip pondered over these idiosyncrasies, and the more he thought of them, the more perplexed he grew. What he had seen was, without doubt, the phantasm of Markham Davidson—of the living Markham Davidson, identical with his old friend, Markham Davidson, in all but the colour of the tie. Red, blood-red! What one earth could have possessed Davidson to wear such a colour! He pondered over this as deeply as though it had been one of the most weighty problems of the Stock Exchange, and when he went to bed that night and looked in his mirror, he saw, instead of his own tie, a blood-red one.

"His dreams took disturbing forms. Three times following he saw Markham Davidson struggling for dear life in a dreary looking pool, situated by the side of a very lonely mountain road, and overshadowed by tall pines, that creaked and groaned like lost souls every time the wind smote them. With such perspicuity were the details in these dreams stamped on his mind, that each time he awoke he saw them again; there they were, everywhere he turned—the glimmering white road with the wide expanse of snow on one side and on the other the long line of low stone wall, beyond which lay darkness and the pool. Heavens! what a pool it was—inky black, unfathomably deep, and hideously suggestive of an antagonistic, insatiable

something that lay crouching in its bosom, ever on the look-out for prey.

"Delaney was fascinated. Although he realised that the very atmosphere of the place was intensely evil, that it had a wholly demoralising effect and contaminated everybody and everything that came near it, although absolutely he understood all this, yet he allowed himself to be drawn unresistingly towards it.

"When he awoke from one vision of it, he craved heaven and hell to permit him to see another. And in this manner he passed the whole night.

"On coming down to breakfast, the first thing that arrested his attention was an envelope—an envelope addressed to him in the well-known writing of Markham Davidson. He tore it open, and with breathless excitement read as follows:—'Dear Phil,—It is a very long time since I heard from you. . . . An irresistible craze has just come over me to go to North Wales. Strange, because, as I daresay you remember, I have always detested Wales. Now, however, I am eaten up with a mad desire to go to Llanginney, an out-of-the-way spot somewhere near Cader Idris. I never heard of it till yesterday, when it suddenly attracted my attention as I was gazing at an atlas. Will you join me there for a day or two? I go to-morrow (Wednesday), and intend staying a week. It would be very pleasant once again to tramp the country-side with you. . . .'

"Delaney looked at the postmark; it was stamped 11.30 p.m. Could Davidson have been on the way to the pillar-box, when he (Delaney) had seen his phantasm? If that were so, then, undoubtedly, it was a case of unconscious projection. Markham, whilst thinking of him (Delaney) in connection with the invitation to Llanginney, had unconsciously separated his immaterial from his material body and projected it. Delaney had read one or two works

on psychic phenomena, and understood from them that spirit projection was not only quite feasible but far from uncommon. However, he could not accept Davidson's invitation. He had not the money. Go to Llanginney, indeed! Why, Davidson might as well have asked him to travel to Petrograd. And yet—the pool, that white road, those shaking pine-trees, that lurking invisible something. Could he resist? For a solid hour he battled with himself, battled till the sweat rose to his brow and poured down his throat and chest. Then he decided. To join Davidson was utterly out of the question. He had neither the time, money, nor inclination. Like the majority of writers, Davidson was a creature of impulse—erratic and irresponsible. He, Philip Delaney, was different. He was a materialist, wholly practical and level-headed. He never acted on the spur of the moment, never chased wild geese. In a very superior frame of mind he sat down and wrote to Davidson, expressing his extreme regret at not being able to accept his invitation. Then he got up, breathed a sigh of relief, and, clapping on his hat, went off to business.

"All that day, however, whilst he was brooding over figures in his office, and listening to the ceaseless babble at the 'Change, his mind reverted to the pool. It was that black piece of water, always that water, and Davidson in his red tie, always that particular red tie, struggling in it. At last he could stand it no longer. He felt that even if he had to sell his wife, and house, and children, he must yield to this attraction —this damnable attraction—and go!

"Darting out of his office, shortly after luncheon, he hurried to the railway station and took the first train home. In less than half an hour he had made all the necessary arrangements for a brief absence, packed his valise and secured a hansom. (All this happened long before the advent of taxis.)

"The train was an express to Chester, but the rest of the journey was slow, and it was nine o'clock before he found himself on the single platform of Llangelly, the nearest station to Llanginney.

"Delaney enquired as to how he was to reach his destination, and was informed by the solitary porter that, if he wished to get there, he must walk.

"'There ain't no vehicles for hire in this part of the country,' the porter said. 'Everyone that comes here has to use their feet. You can't mistake the road. You've only to keep straight on—and you are bound to arrive there.'

"Delaney smiled grimly. He felt as little like walking as he had ever done in his life, and, besides his gladstone, he had a raincoat and umbrella.

"Fortunately the night was fine, and ere he had covered his first half-mile, the moon broke out from behind a cloud and illuminated the entire landscape. For the next mile or two the road was fairly flat, and then it gradually began to rise, the scenery becoming wilder and wilder. Every now and then he paused, and, throwing back his head, drank in deep breaths of the heather-scented air. Delicious! What a change from London! He calculated he must have done about three-quarters of the distance, when he arrived at a turning—the entrance to a lane—a lane that at once made him shudder. He paused opposite the turning, and tried to find some explanation for his fear.

"It was certainly very lonely, and the white patches of moonlight on the footpath and hedgerows suggested much; but, after all, it was only suggestion—suggestion which a few sunbeams would at once dissipate. He was standing within the shadow of a clump of firs facing the lane, and looking intently ahead of him, when, at a distance of some fifty or so yards, the figure of a man in a mackintosh slowly emerged from a gap in the hedge.

"The man merely glanced in Delaney's direction, and then, turning round, moved on down the lane. But the glimpse, momentary though it had been, was sufficient to enable Delaney to identify the person. It was Davidson; he knew him at once by his mannerisms, and he instinctively felt he had on that tie—that flagrantly vulgar, blood-red tie. In an instant he formed a resolution. He would give his friend a surprise. With this intention in view he dropped his valise, and, stepping noiselessly forward, he followed Davidson. On and on they went, the one keeping fifty or so yards behind the other, till there came a sudden bend in the lane, and then Delaney received a shock. Spread out before him, exactly as he had seen it in his dreams, was the panorama of the white glimmering road with the wide, wild expanse of moorland on one side, and on the other the long line of wall, and—the pool. Nothing could have been more like, and it was intensified by the brilliancy of the moonbeams. Crouching in the heather, Delaney watched Davidson slowly walk up to the edge of the water, fold his arms, and gaze in a reflective manner into the shadowy depths. The moments flew by, and still he gazed. Then there came a brief, distracting interval, during which the moon disappeared behind a bank of black, funereal clouds. When it emerged, the figure of Davidson had vanished, and Delaney occupied the spot where he had stood.

"'The pool, the greedy, insatiable pool!' he muttered. 'Dark, deep and devilish. The three D's. I might even add a fourth—damnable!' And turning round with a chuckle, he was preparing to go, when someone vaulted the stone wall to his left and rapidly approached him.

"'You don't mean to say you are still pottering about here,' the stranger, a man about Delaney's own height and build, panted. 'I thought you had returned to the inn long ago.' Then, perceiving his

mistake, he said in amazement, 'Why, it's someone else! I beg your pardon, sir; I quite thought you were an acquaintance of mine.'

"'Davidson, by any chance?' Delaney asked pleasantly.

"'Yes, Markham Davidson,' the stranger said in astonishment. "Do you know him, too?"

"'I am his old friend,' Delaney laughed, 'and I am on my way to join him at Llanginney. I merely stopped here to look at the pool.'

"'The pool,' the stranger ejaculated, eyeing him curiously. 'It is not the pleasantest place in the world, is it?'

"'No,' Delaney replied, 'but it has its fascination. Where did you leave Davidson?'

"'At the entrance to this lane half an hour ago,' the stranger answered, scanning the dark surface of the water anxiously. 'I wanted to get as far as the brow of the hill over yonder, but, as Davidson complained of feeling tired, I set out alone. He said he would follow me slowly and wait for me somewhere about here. Did you by any chance hear a cry?'

"'A cry!' Delaney exclaimed. 'A cry? No. Did you?'

"'I thought I did,' the stranger said, moving away from the edge of the water; 'that is why I hurried here. Perhaps he is somewhere about. Supposing we call.'

"They shouted till they were hoarse, and the great hills opposite hurled back the echoes of their voices, but there was no other reply. Not a sign of Davidson. At last the stranger touched Delaney on the arm.

"'Come,' he said with a shiver, 'the night air is cold. Davidson must have gone back to the inn, and unless we make haste we shall be locked out. They go to bed at eleven.'

"Very reluctantly Delaney gave up the search, and the men were soon tramping along the road in

silence—each apparently too pre-occupied with their own thoughts to speak. Occasionally Delaney glanced covertly at his companion, and whenever he did so, he surprised the latter in the act of peeping cautiously at him. Eventually the lights of Llanginney hove in view, and several of the other visitors at the inn strolled out to meet them.

"'No, Davidson has not returned,' was the reply to their enquiries. 'We have seen nothing of him since you left. It's not eleven yet, however; he has still half an hour, and on such a night as this it would be practically impossible to lose one's way.'

"Delaney engaged his bed, and half an hour later, as Davidson had not yet come back, he made his way to the landlord's private parlour. On the threshold he met his recent companion.

"'Who is he?' he enquired of the landlord, directly the door was closed, and he heard the stranger's footsteps echoing softly down the passage.

"'Who is he?' the landlord sleepily exclaimed. 'Why, Mr. Hartney, a London lawyer. Quite a well-known man in town, so I'm told. No, he has never been here before, and as far as I'm aware he had never met Mr. Davidson till to-day. Will I send someone to look for Mr. Davidson? Why, that is what Mr. Hartney has just asked me! No, sir, I have no one to send,' and he spoke somewhat testily. 'Some of my men have gone—those who sleep out, and the rest are in bed. I shall leave the door open. We aren't afraid of burglars in this part of the country. No, as I told Mr. Hartney, there is no fear of the gentleman being lost—he has gone a little further than he intended, that is all.' And the landlord yawned so emphatically that Delaney beat a hasty retreat.

"'I'm going to bed,' he said, as he passed Hartney in the hall. 'The landlord assures me there is no fear of any harm having befallen Davidson, and that he is sure to turn up all right.'

"'Do you think so?' the lawyer queried.

"Delaney nodded.

"'I know Davidson,' he said; 'I have known him since boyhood. He is the least likely person in the world to meet with mishap.'

"'I am glad to hear you say so,' Mr. Hartney responded. 'Very glad. I fancied somehow—but there, it must have only been fancy. Being intimately acquainted with Mr. Davidson, you would of course know his voice, and had he really called out, you would certainly have heard him. It is doubtless a mere fancy on my part. Good-night!'

"As Delaney wearily climbed the staircase and peeped through the bannister, his eyes encountered those of the lawyer steadily following him. Dog-tired, he lost no time in undressing, but when he got into bed he found sleep would not come to him. He lay first on one side and then on the other, he tried not to think, he resorted to every possible device, but it was all of no avail. It was the pool, always the pool, the pool and the blood-red tie. He kept seeing them before him, and they continually bade him get out of bed and come to them. At last, unable to resist them any longer, he got up, and after slipping on his clothes, stole noiselessly out into the still and narrow country road.

"When he had gone a few yards, he thought he heard a door shut behind him, but, on turning round and perceiving no one, he attributed it to fancy and went ahead at a brisk pace. At last, to his relief, the pool came in view. There it was, just as he had seen it, moon-kissed and silent, with the huge firs shaking their heads ominously on the far side of it, and the long line of glittering white wall casting its black shadow on the grass and gorse, running away from it, in an apparently interminable line, on the side nearest him. It was a sight he knew he would never forget as long as he lived.

"Approaching the brink of the pool, he walked slowly round it, peering anxiously into the water. Suddenly he gave a start. Something white abruptly bobbed to the surface. He looked closely at it, and fancied he discerned a face. He was about to attach a name to it, when he heard something behind him. Swinging sharply round, he confronted Hartney.

"'Good heavens! You here!' he exclaimed. 'Whatever brought you out at this time of night?'

"'I might say the same to you,' the lawyer replied. 'What brought you here?'

"'Davidson,' Delaney said. 'Do you know, I can't help associating him with this pool. It is damnably fascinating.'

"'I can't help associating him with that cry,' Hartney remarked. 'I am certain it was his voice! Good God! what's that?' And he pointed frantically at the white thing bobbing up and down in the water, just where the moonbeams fell thickest, and not half a dozen yards from where they stood.

"'Where?' Delaney said, pressing close to him in a great state of excitement. 'Where? Ah! I see it now. It's looking towards us. That—well, if you wish to know what it is——" He left off abruptly. There was a wild scream, a heavy splash, and he continued his sentence. 'That, Mr. Hartney, is the solution you seek to the mystery.' And he went back to the inn alone, chuckling.

"The sequel to this narrative comes as a surprise. Hartney was not drowned. Being a very powerful swimmer, and lightly clad, he got to the other side of the pool, and, clambering up the bank, he wrung the water from his clothes and ran all the way to the inn. On arriving there, to his intense astonishment, he found Davidson, safe and sound, and dressed in clothes two or three sizes too small for him. Davidson's experience had been very similar to his own. Delaney had suddenly seized him round the waist and hurled him into the middle

of the pool. There, he declared, he felt something like very big and icy cold hands trying to pull him down. He cried for help and prayed, and, as he prayed, the hands relaxed their grasp, and he managed to struggle safely to shore. The shock of what he had gone through, however, was so great that he felt too ill to get back to the inn, and he was compelled to rest awhile at a farm, where he obtained a hot bath and a suit of clothes. As Davidson knew Delaney's wife and family, he begged Hartney, for their sake, to keep the affair as secret as possible.

" The doctor, who was called in to examine Delaney, could not certify him as being actually insane. However, he strongly recommended him to go into a private home for a time, where he would be kept under constant supervision, and Delaney did as the doctor advised. But after being in the home about a month he escaped, and was eventually found drowned in the lonely pool near Llanginney.

" From the description given me of Delaney, I am under the impression that the figure I saw in the mackintosh was his ghost. But what about the figure Hartney was positive he saw floating in the water ? Was it the phantom of someone who had perished there, or had Davidson again unconsciously projected himself ? I incline to the latter. This is the case in toto, and it was told to me by Hartney, who got all the details, apart from those he had himself experienced, direct from Davidson and Delaney."

CHAPTER XIV

I GO ON WITH THE HISTORY OF MY LIFE, AND NARRATE A GHOSTLY HAPPENING IN LIVERPOOL

I GAVE up acting directly I became engaged to be married. I had no alternative, as my fiancée's parents strongly disapproved of the Stage, and so long as I was on it, they would, I knew, never consent to my union with their daughter. But it was rather a wrench, for I really liked acting, and, with the exception of the Sunday travelling, the life suited me well. What other occupation to choose was a poser. All the difficulties that had faced me on my return from the States once again presented themselves, and were aggravated by the fact that I was many years older. I was racking my brain to know what to do for the best, when I received a letter from an old friend in Cornwall, who suggested that I should go down there and open up a small Preparatory Boys' School. It was Hobson's choice, and in due course of time I found myself once again engaged in the profession I loathed. I started with four or five pupils, and had worked up my connection till I had nearly thirty, when someone, with more money than I, set up on a much bigger scale, and my numbers gradually decreased.

I was never an orthodox pedagogue; very much the reverse. I aimed rather at making my pupils

manly than at cramming their heads with book work, and, I think, I succeeded. There were exceptions, of course, but my pupils as a whole developed a fondness for games, both cricket and football, that bore subsequent fruit when they left me and went on the public schools. The out-of-door occupation that formed part of my life now was delightful, but the dry and dull monotony of the schoolroom, and the eternal interference of certain of the parents of my pupils, who wanted everything for nothing, for my fees were ridiculously small, took it out of me so much, that I simply longed to throw up the whole thing and get back to my dearly-beloved stage or writing.

It was while I was in Cornwall that I got my first book, "For Satan's Sake," taken. Mr. Ranger Gull, who was at that time reader for Mr. Arthur Greening's publishing house, read the MS., and was so pleased with it, that he recommended it strongly for publication. It was accepted, but did not appear in print for fully a year.

"The Unknown Depths," which I had written in St. James' Road, Brixton, followed; then "Jennie Barlowe," which I wrote between school hours in Cornwall in the Spring of 1906; then "Dinevah the Beautiful," the last of my efforts in Brixton. The latter appeared in 1907.

In the winter of 1908 my wife was ill, and in the evenings, when my harassing duties in the schoolroom were over, I used to sit by her bedside evolving fresh plots. It was then that I first conceived the idea of writing a ghost book.

In my holidays, which I usually spent in London or the Midlands, never in Cornwall—I always flew away from the precincts of the schoolroom the moment we broke up—I had often gone ghost-hunting, and I now determined to make use of my experiences. Consequently, I mapped out a synopsis of a work on haunted houses, which was at once accepted by Mr. Eveleigh

Nash, who commissioned me to write a book on those lines. I did this in the Summer of 1908, and the book, which appeared in the Autumn of that year and was entitled "Some Haunted Houses of England and Wales," created something of a sensation. It was not only extensively reviewed by the London papers, but by many of the American and Colonial ones as well. From that time onward my pen has rarely been idle, and, apart from compiling some dozen or so works on the Superphysical, I have written innumerable short stories and articles. Indeed, so associated has my name become with everything appertaining to the psychic, that publishers are inclined to the idea that I cannot write upon any other subject. In this, however, I venture to think they are mistaken; for my two works, "The Reminiscences of Mrs. E. M. Ward" and "The Irish Abroad," both published by Sir Isaac Pitman & Co., have been very favourably received by both the Press and public.

It was, however, the success of this first work of mine on ghostly phenomena that made me realise that what I had long hoped for had at last come within measurable distance of attainment. I could give up teaching and devote my time once again, wholly and solely to writing. Never shall I forget with what joy—with what unbounded and infinite joy—I hailed the prospect of leaving for ever behind me all those weary, dreary hours in the schoolroom, where I had been forced to display a patience I never had, and where I had been forced to assume a virtue I never really possessed, namely, a love of teaching.

I made public my intention of giving up the school in the summer of 1908, and the following winter saw me snugly ensconced in a little house in Upper Norwood, where I have been ever since.

Several writers, one of whom I had the pleasure of meeting in London quite recently (his brilliant character studies of young and charming girls figure monthly in

certain of the popular magazines), have been credited with introducing to the public, none too favourably, this Cornish Colony amongst whom I lived. If they have done so, I can certainly endorse their sentiments. In no other town that I have been in have I ever met people who laid themselves open to such unfavourable criticism. I lived there nearly eight years, and during that time I received the bare minimum of hospitality. I found the greater number of the inhabitants bigoted and pharisaical and the townfolk and labouring people not only extremely ignorant, but very unforgiving and vindictive. That they were still—that is to say, at the time I am writing of—in a tribal state was proved by their puerile attitude of hostility to strangers, whom they used frequently to insult and annoy. I signed two petitions relative to the throwing of stones at visitors, which petitions were forwarded to the Home Secretary. The result was nil. The local authorities, in dealing with such cases, displayed the most woeful apathy, and apparently this state of affairs was irremediable, since the magistrates, with few exceptions, were related to half the people in the town.

With the Art Colony I had very little to do. The few artists I knew at all intimately I liked. I found them congenial and generally sympathetic, though displaying an avidity in criticising authors, which, considering their touchiness with regard to any criticism of their own work, was distinctly amusing; all the same, apart from this and one other harmless peculiarity, namely, an exaggerated and unblushing deference to titles, I found them very good fellows, and nearly all the hospitality I received in the town I received from them.

I think I am right in saying there was never a very friendly feeling between the townspeople and the artists. The townspeople looked upon the artists as intruders, "foreigners," whose ways and habits were diametrically opposite to theirs, especially with regard

to the treatment of the Sabbath; whilst the artists showed a none too well concealed contempt for the townspeople, whom they seemed to regard not only as hopelessly inartistic, but of an utterly inferior breed.

In most small towns there is a good deal of unkind gossip and scandal, but I really think that in this respect the town I refer to was unrivalled. It seemed to me that the people were never so happy as when saying malicious things about each other, and they meanly victimised those whose limited means would not permit of their taking legal action against them.

I have often wondered what made these people so peculiarly unkind.

As soon as I had settled down in Norwood, I wrote "Ghostly Phenomena," which was reviewed at length by Andrew Lang in the "Morning Post." About that time I had the great pleasure of meeting Mrs. E. M. Ward. The rencontre happened thus. The Misses Enid and Beatrice Ward, Mrs. Ward's youngest daughters, were getting up some theatricals, and, being short of a man, asked a lady, with whom I was acquainted, if she knew of anyone who would help them out of the difficulty. She wrote to me, with the result that I took part in the play, and thus had the good fortune to meet the Wards, with whom, I am happy to say, I have kept in touch ever since.

A year or so afterwards I edited Mrs. Ward's reminiscences, which was, almost without exception, well received by the Press. Some papers, "Vanity Fair" and the "Weekly Graphic," for instance—the "Graphic" has always been very kind and fair to me,—giving the book several lengthy and highly eulogistic notices. Mrs. Ward is a believer in ghosts, and in her reminiscences there is a very interesting first-hand experience of hers with the Superphysical. Mrs. Ward's children, apart from the fact that they inherit talent from their mother and father, and grandfather, their great-grandfather, James Ward, R.A., and their great-great-uncle,

George Morland, R.A., are very interesting in themselves and possess exceptional personal attractions.

A year after I first visited their house, I was commissioned by the Editor of "The Weekly Despatch," Mr. Beuley, to write a series of ghostly experiences for that paper. In order to do this I made pilgrimages to all parts of the country, and in my zeal to find ghosts occasionally encountered objects of a very different nature. On one occasion, in Brighton, I had taken advantage of a slightly open window to enter a tiny house I had been told was very badly haunted. It was a very dark night, and being unable to find my matches, I had to grope my way about. I was in a room with apparently never ending walls—they seemed to go round and round without any outlet at all. At last, however, I managed to discover a doorway, and, passing through it, I felt my way to a staircase, which I climbed up, till I came to what I judged to be a landing. There all further speculations were brought to an abrupt end by my suddenly falling over some large, soft object on the floor. In an instant, there was a loud yell, and I found myself rolling over and over clawing and clutching at some foul and unsavoury mass, that seemed to have fastened itself on to me with the intention of first probing out my eyes, and then throttling me. The small flask of whiskey that I happened to have on me undoubtedly saved me from total annihilation. The moment the claw-like hands touched the flask, I was free.

I staggered to my feet, searched again, and, this time, fortunately found the match-box and struck a light.

Crouching on the floor in front of me was a long, thin, scraggy creature with an absolutely bloodless face and two big, round, protruding black eyes. Its hair was matted like a mop and tossed about anywhere; its clothes, or rather rags, were buttonless, and only held together, here and there, by pieces of filthy string.

A more disgusting, and at the same time pitiable, spectacle could not be imagined.

It was fortunate for me that I had had previous experience of such sights in the parks and commons of London, otherwise I should have been terrified out of my wits. As it was, I only just managed to pull myself together, and realising that what I saw before me was not a ghost, but a material and now, as far as I was concerned, harmless being, I spoke to it.

"Well," I said, "at any rate you seem to like my whiskey. How long have you been here?"

The flask was gradually lowered, and a voice, which I decided was that of a woman—for up to the present I hadn't been able to decipher its sex—gurgled, "I sleep here every night. This is my house."

"Then the enigma is solved," I said. "You are the ghost!"

"I soon shall be," the creature replied, "for I've eaten nothing for more than two days."

"Well, I'm afraid I cannot give you any more than this," I said, "for it's all I have with me." And I handed her some biscuits and bread and cheese.

Never shall I forget the savage joy with which she snatched the food from my hand and crammed it into her big, gaping, fleshless jaws. No animal in the Zoo was half so voracious. When she had finished it all, and drained the last drop of whiskey, she drew her lean and dirty, albeit well-shaped, fingers across her mouth, and cursed me.

"Get you gone," she snarled, "and leave me here. I tell you this is my house. I've as much right to it as you or anyone else. Get you gone, or I'll spit at you." And not wishing to be spat upon, I picked up my flask and departed.

I encountered another ghost of this order three nights later in a house in Manchester. The house was furnished, but was untenanted, as the owner, a rich and eccentric old lady, believed it to be haunted.

She wrote to me, *àpropos* of my book, "Ghostly Phenomena," and suggested I should try and exorcise the ghost. Now I do not altogether believe in exorcism. There are occasions upon which it has been practised with success, mostly in cases of haunting by phantasms of the sane dead, but there are also many cases, within my own experience, in which it has been practised with no result whatever.

At all events, with my elastic views regarding denominational religion, I did not feel disposed to try it, and so I wrote and told her. She replied, "Come in any case, and give me your opinion as to the nature and cause of the phenomena."

I went. The house was in a quiet, sleepy thoroughfare, not three minutes walk from the Whalley Road. It was big and roomy, and would have been attractive but for the walls, the papers of which had obviously been chosen by someone who did not possess even the most elementary conception of what is pleasing in colour and design. As it was, my artistic susceptibilities were so grossly outraged, that I could well have imagined, the place haunted by neutrarians of the most undesirable order.

I visited the house in the early evening, and the subdued light from the fast-fading sunshine, filtering through the drawn Venetian blinds, produced a singularly sad, and, at the same time, ghostly effect. I had come unaccompanied, for nothing on earth would persuade the old lady or any of her domestics to set a foot in the house, and as I wandered through room after room, the intense hush began at length to tell on my nerves. When I was on the staircase leading to the top storey, I fancied I heard a slight noise, and a sudden faintness coming over me, I had to clutch hold of the banisters to prevent myself falling. I went on, however, and opening a door at the top of the stairs, found myself in a large room communicating with two other rooms by means of doors, both of which stood slightly ajar.

I had passed through the first, and was half across the floor of the second, when I suddenly felt one of my ankles caught hold of. The shock was so great that all the blood in my body seemed suddenly to dry up, and again I all but fainted. Forcing myself to look down, however, I perceived a skinny hand and arm protruding from under the dressing-table, and assured by the appearance of it that it belonged to nothing ghostly, I struck at it with my stick, kicking out vigorously at the same time.

With terrible howlings there now crawled from under the table a long and lanky idiot boy. It transpired that he was the son of one of the old lady's servants, and that he was enjoying a nice, comfortable home at her expense. His mother used to visit him every evening, and this evening he had hidden under the table with the intention of frightening her. Unfortunately for them both, however, he had frightened me instead. The servant, of course, lost her post, and the old lady, assured that there was no longer any fear of ghosts, came back to the house, and, at my suggestion, had all the walls re-papered.

The following week I had another rather strange experience in Liverpool. I was getting dozens of letters weekly at that time, as the first of my series of ghost stories had appeared in the "Weekly Despatch," and my fame as a spook hunter had spread far and wide in consequence. A lady in Liverpool wrote to me, saying that her daughter, Emily, was tormented by a man coming into her bedroom every night at the same time and walking off with her bedclothes. He said nothing, merely opened her door, and, approaching the bed on tip-toe, caught hold of the clothes and hurriedly retreated with them. Spirit lights, my correspondent added, were constantly seen in the room, and at times figures like angels, and she would be glad if I would visit the house, and discover for her, if possible, some explanation of the occurrences. The nature of the

manifestations being somewhat extraordinary, I thought it discreet to take a friend. The house was in a crescent, close to Clayton Square. We were shown into the drawing-room, where all the family were assembled, and we were at once regaled with detailed accounts of all that was alleged to happen. Then we were taken to the bedroom that was haunted, and the young lady whose bed the ghost stripped, at our request, sat there with us. As soon as the electric light was switched off, she began to see spirit lights. We saw nothing. No man appeared, and, on taking our departure, we both agreed that the phenomena were subjective, and that it was simply a case of hallucination. Accordingly, I advised her mother to consult a good general practitioner, as, in all probability, her daughter needed a tonic and change of air. I strongly warned her against consulting any professional Spiritualist.

Well, I returned to London, and thought no more of the matter till the following Christmas, when, quite by chance, I ran against a young doctor, to whom I had mentioned the incident. Evidently eager to communicate something, he remarked, " You remember that Liverpool case you told me about—the case of the young lady whose bedclothes used to disappear, and which you thought was hallucination ? Well, you were mistaken. Since I saw you, I have become acquainted with the doctor who attends her, and he told me that, whilst he was there one day, the bedroom door opened and in walked a young man. He says the girl immediately exclaimed, ' Here is the man who haunts my room at night. For goodness sake, Doctor, do something ! ' Whereupon, the man, muttering some words in German, abruptly left the room. My doctor friend immediately ran after him, but he was nowhere to be seen, and although the house was at once searched, no traces of him could be found. Now, what do you think of the case ? "

" It is certainly a very unusual one," I replied,

" and, as you say, this sequel quite upsets my theory of hallucination. It may be a case of projection. Someone who knows the girl and wishes to torment her is experimenting in visiting her in his immaterial ego. I have heard of similar cases."

" But she knows no one like him," my friend responded.

" Probably not," I said. " The image she sees may be, and very likely is, merely an assumed one. Does she know any Indians, or anyone who is an earnest student of the occult ? Find out if you can."

I have not yet heard from my friend, but I still incline to the idea that the ghost in this case was a phantasm of the living, rather than a phantasm of the dead.

CHAPTER XV

SOME STRANGE CASES IN BIRMINGHAM, HARROGATE, SUSSEX AND NEWCASTLE

WHILST I was still writing for "The Weekly Despatch," I happened to visit an old friend of mine, a Captain Rupert Tennison, who was staying with an aged relative in the Hagley Road, Birmingham.

"This is hardly the house you would expect to see a ghost in, is it?" he remarked to me after luncheon. "And yet I can assure you I had a very remarkable psychic experience here, in this very room. I've often wanted to tell you about it. It happened one New Year's Eve three and a half years ago. My aunt had a nephew, on her husband's side, called Jack Wilmot, and he and I used to meet here regularly at the commencement of every New Year. On this occasion, however, my aunt informed me that Wilmot was unable to be present, as he was detained in Mexico, where he had a very good post as a mining engineer.

"I was much disappointed, for Wilmot and I were great pals, and the prospect of staying here alone with the old lady struck me as perfectly appalling. I resolved to make the best of it, however, for I was genuinely sorry for my aunt, whom I could see was quite as disappointed as I was. I arrived late in the afternoon of December 31st. We dined at seven, and

at nine my aunt went off to bed and left me in this room by myself.

"For some time I read—no, not one of your books, O'Donnell—a Guy Maupassant; but the light being rather bad, and my eyes tired, for I had been travelling all the previous night, I was at last obliged to desist and devote myself entirely to a pipe.

"The servants went to bed at about ten. I heard them tap respectfully at my aunt's door on their way, and wish her good-night. After that the house was absolutely silent, so silent, indeed, that the hush began to get on my nerves, and I was contemplating retiring also, when heavy footsteps suddenly crossed the hall and the door of this room was flung wide open. I looked round in amazement. Standing on the threshold was Wilmot.

"'Why, Jack!' I cried. 'I am glad to see you, old fellow. Your aunt told me you could not come. How did you manage it?'

"'Quite easily,' he said in the light, careless manner which was one of his characteristics. 'Where there's a will, there's a way, you know. I've taken French leave.'

"'Taken French leave!' I ejaculated. 'Then there'll be the deuce to pay when you get back. Anyhow, that's your affair, not mine. You'll have some supper?'

"'No,' he said; 'I had a very good meal a short time ago, and I'm not the least bit hungry. We will chat instead.'

"He pulled his chair up to the table, and, leaning his elbows on it, stared right into my face.

"'You don't look very well, Jack,' I said. 'Maybe this strong light has something to do with it, but you are as pale as a sheet. Is it the voyage?'

"'Not altogether,' he replied. 'I've had a lot of trouble lately.'

"'Tell me,' I said.

"'Won't it bore you?' he replied. 'After all, why should I bother other people with my woes. Oh, all right, I will if you like.

" ' Some months ago there came to the town where I am working a wealthy Spaniard and his wife. Their name was Hervada. He was a tall, lean, sour-faced old curmudgeon, and she one of the most beautiful young creatures you can imagine. You can guess what happened ? '

" ' You fell in love with her, of course,' I cried.

" ' From the moment I saw her,' Jack replied.

" ' You got introduced,' I said.

" ' Trust me,' he laughed. ' I found out where she lived, and the rest was so easy that before the end of the week I had dined with them, and also had had one clandestine meeting in the Park. At first her old villain of a husband suspected nothing. But it is infernally hard to keep up a pretence for long, when one is really madly consumed with passion. Eyes are sure indicators of what the heart feels, at least mine are, and when Hervada suddenly looked up and caught me gazing at his wife as if I could devour her, the cat was completely out of the bag. I give him credit for one thing, however : he took it very calmly. Despite his unprepossessing exterior he could at times be extremely courteous and dignified.

" ' You will oblige me by settling this matter in the way customary to gentlemen in this country,' he said. ' You must remember you are not in England now ; you are in Mexico. Have you a revolver ? '

" ' I am never without one,' I replied.

" ' Then,' he observed, ignoring the intervention of his wife, whose apprehensions were only too plainly more on my account than on his, ' we will step on to the verandah.'

" ' What ! ' I said. ' You don't mean to say you actually fought a duel ? '

" Jack nodded. ' Yes ! ' he said. ' We measured off twenty paces, and then, turning round, fired.'

" ' And you killed him ? '

" ' That would be your natural surmise,' was the reply.

'But you are mistaken. It was I who was killed.'

"The moment he had said these words, he seemed to fade away, and before I could recover from my astonishment, he had completely disappeared, and I found myself staring not at him but the blank wall. And now comes the oddest part of it. I naturally expected to hear Jack was dead. I said nothing to my aunt, but I wrote off to his address at once.

"Judge, then, of my relief when I received a letter from him by return of post to say he was absolutely fit and well, and getting on splendidly. That was in February. In the following August my aunt wrote to me saying a very tragic occurrence had taken place. Jack was dead. He had been found on the verandah of an hotel in Mexico shot through the heart. Though the identity of his murderer was generally suspected, there was no actual proof, and as the man was very rich and influential, it was thought quite useless to take up the case. Now what kind of superphysical phenomenon do you call that?" Captain Tennison concluded.

"I can't exactly say," I replied. "It is one of those strange prognostications of the future that happen more often on New Year's Eve than on any other day of the year.

"I don't think the phantasm you saw was actually Wilmot's spirit. I don't see how it could have been. I think it was an impersonating neutrarian, one of that order of phantasms that have never inhabited any kind of material body, and whose special function is apparently to foretell the end of certain people, and certain people only."

. . . . . .

When I had finished my articles for "The Weekly Despatch," which I was writing in alternation with "The Reminiscences of Mrs. E. M. Ward," I took a brief holiday, visiting for the first time Matlock and Harrogate.

Learning that there was an alleged haunted house in the latter town, I sought, and managed to obtain, permission to spend a night in it. It was a modern edifice of a great height, situated about ten minutes walk from St. James' Hall.

I went there alone, and, on entering the premises, encountered an almost death-like air of stillness, which contrasted oddly with the world outside, where all was life and gaiety. But a moment before I had mixed with the streams of ultra-fashionable people heading for the Spa Concert, the Theatre, and the Valley Park, and, so free had they seemed from all trouble and responsibility—so full of sparkling, spontaneous fun and flippancy—and above all, so full of the flamboyant spirit of sheer life, that one could not help feeling, as one looked at them, that after all there could be no such thing as death for them—that such pronounced vitality must go on for ever.

But this house—this forsaken house, void of furniture, of everything, save the soft summer evening sunlight, the shadows, and my presence—how different! Wandering from room to room, and floor to floor, I at length completed my preliminary search, and being somewhat tired, I sat down on the floor of the hall, and, taking a newspaper from my pocket, started reading. As the hours passed by and darkness came on, I began to be afraid. No amount of experience in ghost hunting will ever enable me to overcome that awful, hideous fear that seizes me when I see the last glimmer of daylight fade, and I realise I am about to be brought into contact with the superphysical, and that I must face it—alone.

Noises in empty houses I have noticed usually commence in the basement, and I was not at all surprised when presently I heard a faint tapping proceeding from one of the kitchens. This was followed by a long spell of silence, and then one of the stairs creaked. My heart gave a big thump, and I gazed expectantly

into the darkness before me, but there was nothing to be seen. Silence again, and then more tapping, and more creaking. Something then tickled my hand, and a moment later my fingers touched a blackbeetle. In an instant I was on my feet, for I dread beetles more than I dread ghosts, and, on my striking a light, I found the whole floor swarming. I wondered very much at this, because beetles do not as a rule frequent houses that have been empty for any length of time, especially in a climate like that of Harrogate. I have since, however, arrived at the conclusion that where there are hauntings, there are, more often than not, plagues of beetles, but whether attracted by the ghost, or not, I cannot say.

As I could no longer tolerate the idea of remaining in the hall in the dark, I lighted four candles, and, placing them on the floor, sat in the midst of them.

It was only eleven o'clock by my watch, and the idea of keeping up my vigil till the morning did not strike me as particularly pleasant. I took up my paper and again began to read. Half an hour or so passed, and then I received a start. A door opened and shut downstairs, and bare footsteps pattered their way along the stone passage and up the wooden stairs.

The nearer they drew, the more intolerable became my suspense. What should I see ? A white-faced, glassy-eyed phantasm of the dead, or some blood-curdling, semi-human, semi-animal neutrarian. Which would it be ? I confess I would have given all I possessed to be out in the road, but, as is usually the case with me when in the presence of the superphysical, I was quite powerless to speak or move. Then, to my unfeigned astonishment, instead of anything grotesque and awful, there appeared before me a little fair-haired girl, clad in a much-soiled pinafore and without either shoes or stockings.

Though not actually crying, she appeared in great distress, and feeling around on all sides, as if anxiously

searching for someone, she ran past me, and commenced to ascend the stairs. Picking up a candle, I followed her, and, as the patterings of her poor, chilled feet spread their echoes far and wide through the vast deserted house, I thought I had never experienced anything half so pathetic. On and on we went, the little thin legs leading the way, till we reached the top storey, when she ran into a room facing me, and slammed the door. I immediately followed, but the room was quite empty. There were no signs of the child ; there was only a particularly vivid beam of moonlight, and a virile and overwhelming atmosphere of sadness.

During the next few days I was told a story that fully accounted for the hauntings.

It appears that about thirty years before my visit to the house a little girl had lived there with her father and step-mother. Her nurse, to whom she was very much attached, being summarily dismissed by her step-mother, she became ill, and very soon died, so it was rumoured, of a broken heart.

Shortly after her death the house was to let, and no tenant, I found out, has ever occupied it since for very long.

I have often wished that I had spoken to the sad little spirit, but I was too fascinated by it, and too much engaged watching its movements, to think of anything else. And I have found that this same fascination and preoccupation have prevented me from trying to communicate with the ghost in nearly all the cases of haunting that I have ever investigated. On the few occasions that I have spoken to a phantasm, I have received no reply, no indication even that it has heard me.

In a very famous haunted house in the West of England, during my investigations which were spread over a period of nine, not uninterruptedly consecutive, nights, manifestations took place twice, and on both occasions I stood up and spoke, but in neither case was

there any response whatever. This same ghost had been subjected to exorcism by a well-known ecclesiast, but, far from being exorcised, the ghost so scared his exorciser that he all but fainted. These demonstrations were visual. In a haunted house that I was asked to visit in Sussex I saw nothing, but heard knockings, and by means of them tried, though without success, to establish a code. I heard of the case in this way.

A young lady, whom I will call Miss Hemming, wrote to me. She and her mother occupied a modern and picturesquely situated house at the foot of the Downs, and were very frequently disturbed, she said, between nine and ten in the evening, by sounds, such as might be made with a muffled hammer, on the wall of her mother's room. Simultaneously the figure of a young man moved noiselessly across the lawn, from the direction of a swing. He usually approached her window and came to a halt immediately beneath it. He had never replied when spoken to. She had fired at him several times, but the bullets had had no effect whatever. It seemed as if they had passed right through him, because he still stood there, whilst the gravel was splattered up immediately behind him. On one or two occasions he shone a bicycle lamp on his face, so that she could distinctly see his features. It was the face of no one she knew, though she fancied it bore a close resemblance to a notorious murderer, whose photos had been in the papers, and who had expiated his crime on the gallows. These were not the only manifestations. Stones had been repeatedly thrown at Mrs. Hemming, and, although the house was being closely watched by the police, the stone-throwing still went on, and so far the culprit had not even been seen, let alone caught.

I visited the house once by myself, and once with a party of men. On the former occasion I hid in a little copse at the furthest extremity of the lawn, and watched the house and swing closely, but I neither heard nor

saw anything. Returning to the house, I was told by Miss Hemming that both she and her mother had heard the knockings, and that she herself had, at the same time, seen the figure on the lawn.

On the occasion of my second visit, we all heard the knockings on the wall of Mrs. Hemming's room, and one of us, who was looking out of her daughter's window, saw what he fancied were two shadows of human beings cross the moonlit lawn and vanish in the direction of a hedge. Trickery was practically impossible, as the garden was protected on all sides by barbed wire, and there were on the premises four or five dogs, including a young bloodhound. We had of course made a thorough search of the house and grounds previously.

One or two other incidents happened during the night. When I was in the hall alone, a light, as from a bicycle lamp, was suddenly shone in my face, apparently from a blank wall, and when we were all seated in front of the dining-room fire, we heard heavy footsteps cross the hall, and although we ran out at once we could see no one. We were shown the stones that were alleged to have been thrown, but none were thrown whilst we were there. They were a peculiar kind of flint, which certainly did not belong to the neighbourhood. Mrs. Hemming had several times narrowly escaped being hit by them, and one had crashed through the bedroom window as she was looking out of it.

I did not continue my investigation of the case, because there were certain features in connection with it of a private and family nature, which greatly added to its complexity, and which would, of necessity, have rendered any attempt at solution incomplete and unsatisfactory.

Cases of complex haunting, although, for obvious reasons, seldom admitting of any satisfactory explanation, always interest me the most. Here is one I chanced to hit upon in Newcastle.

A house in —— Street had stood empty for seven

or eight years, and on my making enquiries about it, I was told to apply to a Mr. Black, the last tenant. I did so, and Mr. Black very kindly gave me a detailed account of what had taken place there during his tenancy. It was as follows :—

"A day or two after our arrival I happened to be going upstairs, and, as I passed by one of the bedrooms, the door of which was slightly open, I glanced in, and saw the figure of a lady, whom I had never seen before. She was dressed in green, and standing in front of the looking-glass, engaged apparently in putting on her hat. Wondering who on earth she could be, for I knew the room had not been slept in, I spoke to her, and receiving no reply, I was advancing towards her, when she suddenly disappeared. I did not know what to make of the affair, but, thinking that possibly it was an hallucination, I resolved to think no more of it, and to say nothing about it to any of my family or household.

"Some days later, however, when out walking with my wife, I met a friend who asked me where I was living. I told him, and he exclaimed excitedly :

"'Good gracious, not in that house ! Why, my dear fellow——' At a sign from me he stopped. I had guessed what was coming, and as my wife is extremely nervous I thought it best she should not hear what I knew he was going to say, namely, that the house was haunted.

"That night I went round to see my friend. He made no bones about it ; he told me that the house I had taken was haunted—that he knew it for a fact.

"'Some months ago,' he said, 'I was thinking of taking it myself, and, obtaining the key from the agent, went to look over it. It was quite light, not more than five o'clock in the afternoon, and the house seemed bright and cheerful. Closing the front door carefully behind me, I commenced a tour of the premises. I had reached the top floor, and was standing in the centre of one of the rooms, when I heard a slight noise.

I started, and, turning round in the direction from which the sound came, perceived a lady and a little girl standing in the doorway watching me. There was nothing at all remarkable about them. The lady was dressed in green, the child in white, both modern, or at least comparatively modern, costumes. I was so surprised at their being there, however, as I knew I had shut the hall door, that I simply stood and stared at them. Then something much more extraordinary happened—they vanished. It was not an hallucination —that I can swear to—and thoroughly scared, I tore downstairs and out of the house. After this I gave up all idea of taking the place, and I can't help feeling sorry, old fellow, that you've taken it.'

"In spite of this warning," Mr. Black continued, "I did not give up the house immediately. After we had been there a week or so, a cousin of mine came to stay with us; and one evening he and one of my children, who were in the drawing-room, together heard a soft, cautious whistle—as if someone were giving a signal, coming, they thought, from just behind them. The whistle was repeated, and a few minutes later they heard a loud cry, half human, half animal, and wholly ominous. My cousin pretended it was one of the servants, but my child would not be convinced, and begged to be taken to bed at once, as she dared not remain in the room any longer. After this, phenomena of all kinds happened; steps used to be heard bounding up and down the stairs at all hours of the night; one of the maids declared she saw something that was a man and yet not a man come out of the drawing-room with a run, and race up the staircase two or three steps at a time; heavy pantings and sighs were heard, and several of the household were awakened by a cold hand being laid upon their face. But I think the most remarkable thing that happened is this:—I was sitting in my study one evening, when the maid rapped at my door and said that a clergyman

"I suddenly caught sight of a large eye"

(whom she had shown into the drawing-room) wished to see me on some very urgent matter. I at once put down the book I was reading, and, hastening to the drawing-room, found it empty. Wondering what had become of the clergyman, I was about to ring the bell to enquire, when I suddenly caught sight of a large eye, human in shape and horribly sinister, glaring at me from behind an arm-chair. I was so frightened that I could do nothing but stare back at it, and then, to my intense relief, my wife entered the room with a friend, and the phenomenon disappeared."

"And the parson?" I observed.

"I never heard anything more of him," Mr. Black remarked. "The maid assured me on her honour that she had shown him into the room, but no one saw him leave the house, so he, too, might have been a ghost; but supposing him to have been a living person, his disappearance would not be unnatural. He had doubtless seen the eye and precipitated himself into the street through the open window.

"The following day, my children being badly frightened by something in one of the passages, I decided to leave the house; and, although I afterwards made every possible enquiry, I could never hear of anything particularly tragic that had ever happened there. We were the first tenants, so I was told, that had ever complained of disturbances, and it was suggested that we might have brought the ghosts with us, but as none of us had ever seen a ghost before we entered that house, and we had no old furniture, at least none that we had not always had, and not one of us had ever attended a séance or in any way dabbled with Spiritualism, I do not think that theory at all possible. How do you account for the hauntings?"

"I cannot," I replied, "nor can anyone else. The sheer complexity of such a case renders any definite conclusion with regard to it extremely difficult, and any positive solution of it utterly out of the question."

CHAPTER XVI

WAR GHOSTS

Of late years the increase of interest taken in things psychical, particularly among the more educated classes, the classes that were at one time incorrigibly sceptical, has been enormous. I believe this to be mainly due to the fact that people are no longer satisfied with the scriptural declaration of another world. They want proof of it—that is to say, absolutely authentic and corroborative evidence that it exists—and they feel that they can only obtain such evidence by witnessing superphysical manifestations themselves. Psychical Research Societies, perhaps, convince them even less than the Bible. And naturally, for the scientist, even though he be titled, can hardly hope to accomplish in one generation what theologians, of an equal if not superior intelligence, have attempted and failed to accomplish throughout the ages. Hence, I am of the opinion that one can learn more from one spontaneous ghostly manifestation in a haunted house than from a thousand lectures, or a thousand books. Experience is the only medium of conviction, and so long as people are without a personal experience relating to another world, they can never really believe. The boy in rags and tatters may be far more conversant with—may know far more about—a future life than the more

learned Professor at the University. But no one can logically claim to be an absolute authority on the Unknown; the most any of us can do—even those of us who have actually seen and heard spirit manifestations—the rest do not count—is to speculate. When we attempt to do more, we label ourselves fools.

Of all the professions, none, I believe, is more interested in this question of another world than the theatrical I have a great many friends amongst actors and actresses, and I find them not only keenly interested in my work, but always ready—even when working hard themselves—to share my vigils in a haunted house.

Only the other day, at a concert given by the Irish Literary Society in Hanover Square, I was introduced to Miss Odette Goimbault, who recently delighted London audiences by her impersonation of the child "Doris" in "On Trial" at the Lyric Theatre. Odette Goimbault is unquestionably pretty—but there is much in her looks besides mere prettiness. She has eyes that are extraordinarily spiritual, eyes that seem to look right into the soul of things and see things that are not generally seen by ordinary mortals.

When a very small child, Odette Goimbault lived with her mother in a house at Thornton Heath. A lady died of consumption in the flat immediately beneath Mrs. Goimbault's, and after the burial, Odette, though previously very fond of staying up late, used, every night, precisely at seven o'clock, to beg her mother to take her upstairs to bed, declaring, in a great state of terror and with tears in her eyes, that she saw an old man with only one leg standing in a corner of the room shaking his stick at her. When once she was taken out of the room her fears subsided.

In my opinion she is an ideal young actress for the pourtrayal of soul, for the transmittal of a sense of soul to the audience, and I think there is no one, either on the stage or off it, who looks more in touch with the spiritual world than Odette Goimbault.

But stronger even than its hold upon the theatrical profession is the stand that psychism has taken with regard to the present war.

Ever since the fighting began I have heard speculations raised as to whether our soldiers at the Front have been witnessing ghostly manifestations or not. So far, I must own that I have elicited very little reliable evidence on this point, but the circumstances have established at least one interesting fact, and that is, that to the man in the street the question of another world has at last become a matter of some importance.

The wife of a very eminent official at the War Office told me a few weeks ago that officers who took part in the Dardanelles Expedition assured her that figures believed to be ghosts were on several occasions seen gliding over the ground after an engagement, especially where the dead bodies of the Turks lay thickest. The same lady also told me that when a certain regiment formed up after a brilliant charge, in which it had suffered very severe casualties, some of the gaps in the ranks were observed to be filled by shadowy forms—forms which disappeared the moment anyone attempted to touch them.

Neither my informant nor any of the soldiers from the Front that I have met have been able to give me any information as to the alleged superphysical demonstrations in the sky during the retreat from Mons. But I should like to record here, in connection with the war, a case I heard in Paris. I published an account of it in the November, 1915, number of "The Occult Review," and now reproduce it through the courtesy of Mr. Ralph Shirley:

"The mention of Ferdinand of Bulgaria brings vividly back to my memory two stories I heard about him, when I was dining one evening in June, 1914, at the renowned Henriette's Restaurant in Montparnasse. Two men were seated at a table close beside me, and I eventually got into conversation with them. They

informed me they were journalists, and that their names were Guilgaut and Bonivon respectively.

" ' You would laugh, if you knew where I spent last night,' I observed. ' I was in an alleged haunted flat in Montrouge. I don't suppose either of you believes in ghosts ? '

" ' I do,' Guilgaut said. ' I have had more than one experience with an apparition in my life, and so has my friend.'

" ' Yes,' chimed in Bonivon, ' we have good cause to remember ghosts, since we stayed six weeks in a haunted hotel in Bucharest, and never had such an infernally uncomfortable time either before or since. We never saw the ghost ourselves, but one of the other lodgers declared he did, and used to wake us every other night by the most unholy screams.'

" They then talked a lot about their adventures in the Balkans, and finally alluded to Ferdinand of Bulgaria. ' If ever a man is haunted, he is,' Guilgaut remarked. ' I believe he never leaves his room at night without the shadow of Stambuloff, whose death he brought about in 1895. It simply steps out from the wall and follows him.'

" ' That is a lot of exaggeration,' Bonivon said with a laugh. ' But, quite seriously, we heard on very excellent authority that on more than one occasion a figure has been seen accompanying Ferdinand sometimes when dining and sometimes when walking, and that it has been recognised by the spectators as Stambuloff, the dead Minister. Once, we were told, Ferdinand visited a certain Princess, and it was remarked that Her Royal Highness appeared strangely embarrassed and perturbed. At last someone ventured to enquire of the lady-in-waiting, who also appeared to be greatly perturbed, what was the matter. " It's that man," was the whispered reply, " that man who persists in standing beside His Majesty. He never takes his eyes from our faces, and he looks just like a corpse." Her interrogator

asked her to describe the figure, which he said was quite invisible to him.

" ' She did so, and the description tallied exactly with that of Stambuloff.'

" ' Tell him about Ferdinand and the fortune-teller,' Guilgaut said.

" ' Yes, that happened when we were staying close to his Kohary estates,' Bonivon responded. ' Ferdinand is notoriously sly and mean, and one day, as he was passing through the village where we were staying, he chanced to encounter a charming Hungarian maiden, who eked out a very precarious livelihood hawking ribbons and telling fortunes. Ferdinand had his hand read, and, thinking to trap the girl, disguised himself and went to her again the following evening. To his astonishment, although the make-up was skilful, for Ferdinand is a born actor in more senses than one, the girl recognised him at once as the gentleman who had been to her the previous evening. " I was expecting you," she said. " Expecting me ? " Ferdinand stammered. " How is that ? I've told no one." " Oh, fie ! " the girl remonstrated, shaking her finger at him. " The gentleman who accompanied you last night came here himself an hour ago and told me you were coming." " What was he like ? " Ferdinand asked, shaking all over. " Like," the girl retorted pertly. " Why, you know as well as I do," and she rattled off a description of the man, which tallied exactly with that of the dead Stambuloff, whom, by-the-way, Guilgaut and I had seen many scores of times in the early eighties. " Your friend," the girl continued, " left a message for you. He said—tell him when he comes that he will perish in very much the same manner as I have done ; and he showed me his hand." " And what did you see ? " Ferdinand asked. " I saw the same ending to the life line in his hand as I see in yours," the girl replied. " Why, there is your friend ! He is beckoning to you. You had better go to him." And, to her

astonishment, Ferdinand walked off in the opposite direction.

" ' We had the story first hand. She told it us two or three days afterwards, and expressed great anxiety as to the identity of the two men who had behaved so strangely to her.' "

Only one case of haunting at the actual Front has been related to me. I will state it in my own words.

It happened during the retreat from N——.

The O——'s had suffered heavily, and, in the scramble to get out of the deadly fire zone, small parties of them, owing to the nature of the country, had got isolated from the main body and left behind. This was the case with a dozen or so men of B Company, who, after racing across a field amid a hail of shrapnel, had clambered over a formidable barrier of barbed wire into a dense wood.

Under cover of a thick cluster of trees they sat down and doctored their wounds. There was not a sound man amongst them. Sergeant Mackay had been struck in three places in his right leg; Corporal MacIntyre had had a good square inch of flesh taken off his thigh; Private Findlay had lost three of his fingers; and Bugler Scott—an ear; while, in addition to these slight inconveniences, they were all ravenously hungry and parched with thirst.

" I suggest," said Sergeant Mackay, after a brief lull in their conversation, " that we push on again and see if we can find some sort of habitation where we can get a mouthful."

" Aye, mon ! " Corporal MacIntyre replied, for during such " sauve qui peuts " all formality of rank is dropped, " It's the wee drappie I'm thinking after, and unless we get some of it pretty soon there'll not be any of us left to need it. I'm bleeding like a pig, and so are a good many more of us."

" Very well, then," Sergeant Mackay observed, rising with difficulty, and wincing in spite of his efforts to appear comfortable. " Let us press on."

The men were all absolutely ignorant of their surroundings. They had seen nothing of the country save from the train, and during a few hours' tramp from the railway depot to the lines they had just evacuated. Consequently, for all they knew to the contrary, the wood that lay in front of them might stretch for miles, or might be inhabited by anything from grizly bears to hyænas—for the knowledge of the British " Tommy " with regard to the fauna and flora of Belgium is extremely limited.

Threading their way through the thick undergrowth, they stole stealthily forward, the roar of artillery still sounding faintly in their ears, till at length they emerged into a wide clearing, at the far extremity of which stood a neatly thatched white cottage. It was so home-like with its small plot of flower-bedecked garden, its walls covered with clematis and honeysuckle, and its tiny spiral column of smoke curling heavenwards, that the bleeding and exhausted men gave deep sighs of relief.

" Reminds me of Scotland," Private Findlay whispered.

" It's as like my mother's cottage as two peas," Private Callum retorted.

They halted, and were looking at Sergeant Mackay to see what he would do—for bold as the O——'s are in battle, they are often among the most bashful of His Majesty's troops in time of peace—when suddenly the door of the cottage opened and an old woman appeared on the threshold, armed with a blunderbuss. Glaring fiercely and shouting, she put the weapon to her hip and fired. There was a loud bang, and one or two of the men uttered ejaculations of pain.

" God save us ! " Sergeant Mackay cried. " The gude wife takes us for Germans." Then addressing the woman, who was pouring another handful of shot into the muzzle of her infernal piece of antiquity, he called out, ' Are ye daft or glaikit ? Dinna ken that we are Scots. Anglais."

It was the only word of French the Highlander knew, and, on shouting it three times in rapid succession, and with increased emphasis, it had effect. The old woman lowered her weapon, and shading her eyes with a lean, brown, and knotted hand, exclaimed. "Ah, moi dieu, les Anglais! On me dit que les Anglais sont les amis des Belgiques. Et je vous aurai tué! Pardonnez-moi messieurs."

This speech was of course lost upon the Highlanders, who would have laughed—so comic was the picture of this old woman with the ancient gun—had they not been faint from exhaustion.

Now, as she beckoned to them to approach, they doffed their caps and filed in at her gate, Sergeant Mackay leading the way.

The interior of the house was as they had expected—scrupulously neat and clean.

"Wipe your boots, boys," Sergeant Mackay whispered. "We mustn't put the old lady out more than we can help."

They all trooped in. As soon as they were seated the old woman vanished through a low doorway, reappearing a few seconds later laden with bread and cheese and wine, which she watched them eat and drink with perfect satisfaction, and when they had finished, conducted them to a loft at the back of the cottage, where she made them understand by signs they could lie as long as they pleased.

"I kinna think," Sergeant Mackay said, as soon as their hostess had retired, "where the Germans are. It's passing strange they have not put in an appearance here."

"Maybe they've gone by and missed this spot. It's nae sae handy," Private Findlay said. "Anyhow, I'm for sleeping—for it's ten days since I shut my eyes."

"It's the same with me," ejaculated Private McCallum. "I hae not slept a wink since we left Plymouth."

Apparently they were all of the same opinion—namely, that they needed rest; and, without further ado, every man selected a place in the hay, stretched himself out at full length, and was soon fast asleep.

The afternoon wore away, the sun set, and one by one the stars made their appearance, but still the men slept.

The gloom of the forest thickened, and with the long and waving shadows of the elms and beeches crept forth forms of a more tangible and sinister nature. Sergeant Mackay awoke with a start, and, springing to his feet, strained his ears and listened.

"Nightmare!" he said. "I made certain the Germans had got hold of me. Weel, weel, it's nowt but a dream. I will go and see what the gude wife is about, and, perhaps, if she hae not gone to bed, she will gie us some hot tea or milk—that red wine of hers hae made me uncommon thirsty." He scrambled down on to the ground, and, leaving the rest of the men still asleep, crossed the yard and pushed open the door leading to the kitchen. He was about to enter, when there came a half-choking cry and the front of the house filled with soldiers. Sergeant Mackay knew them at once—they were Germans! Shrinking back into the shadow of the doorway he stood and listened. Though he could not understand their jargon, he soon formed an idea of what was taking place. They had caught the old woman by surprise and were discussing what they should do with her. Had the O——s been armed, Sergeant Mackay would not have hesitated —he would have staked anything on a win against odds at six to one, but in their hasty flight the men had left their rifles behind them, and it would be sheer suicide for them to attack the Germans with their bare fists. Therefore it at once entered his mind to slip out quietly and warn his comrades, so that they could escape without their presence being detected. A cry of pain, however, made him hesitate.

Two Germans had hold of the old woman's arms and were twisting them round.

The difficulty of his position was not lost on Sergeant Mackay. If he played the knight errant and helped the old woman, he would not be able to give his comrades

the necessary warning, and they would all be taken prisoners—perhaps shot. On the other hand this gude wife had been extremely kind to them, and was proving her loyalty by maintaining an absolute silence as to their presence in the cottage. Could he stand by and see her abused ? He could not. There was too much of the Gael in him for that, and as the old woman gave another gurgle, he stepped out from his hiding place, and picking up a kitchen chair, rushed at her captors, both of whom he stunned. He was, of course, eventually borne down by numbers, and dragged to the ground.

" What shall we do with him ? " one of the men who were holding him asked. " The dog ! He has broken Fritz's head, and more than half killed Hans. He has arms like a bullock."

" Hang him," the sergeant in charge of the men replied. " Tie him and the old woman together and hang them from this beam." And he pointed to a great, white rafter running across the ceiling.

Sergeant Mackay's uniform should, of course, have protected him, but, then, as the German sergeant put it, this cottage was well hidden in the woods, the English were evacuating the country, and no one was likely to come across the bodies, saving Belgian peasants who dare not say anything, and German soldiers who would not say anything. So Sergeant Mackay was dragged up from the floor, beaten and bruised till there was very little of him left, bound tightly to the old gude wife, and hanged with her. The Germans then ransacked the house, and were preparing to explore the outer premises, when a bugle rang out, and they hurriedly left the cottage. Ten minutes later, when all was quiet, into the house, on tip-toe, stole the rest of the O——s.

" God save us ! " ejaculated Private Findlay, starting back and pointing to the grim figures swaying gently from the ceiling. " God save us ! Sae what the deils hae done !"

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"Halt!" The word of the Colonel, transmitted by his adjutant to the head of the column, brought the O——s to a dead stop.

For this they were not altogether sorry, as they had been footing it for eight or nine hours on end—and every little respite was welcome. But the Colonel in this instance, at least, was not intentionally a good Samaritan. He had halted, not for the purpose of resting his men, but because he was fogged as to his whereabouts. The night was inky black, the country difficult —all hills, deep depressions and thick woods—and the Colonel, relying implicitly on the guidance of his intelligence officer, whom he supposed had made himself thoroughly familiar with the locality, found himself obviously going astray. He should now be at a railway bridge, which was six miles from the village of Etigny, the last landmark. But no such bridge, as far as he could judge, was anywhere near, and Lambert, the intelligence officer, on being questioned, admitted he did not exactly know where they were. That is why the Colonel had halted. His object was to make a flank attack on the German outposts, who were supposed to be in hiding in a wood, some three miles to the south of T——, where the extreme right of their main army lay, and obviously it was of no use advancing any further until he had ascertained the direction in which he must steer.

In this wood was a cottage, that had been enlarged and fortified, and hitherto used as a place of internment and hospital for English prisoners, until they could be transported to Potsdam. Reports had reached the English C.O. that the Germans intended killing all their prisoners, if compelled to evacuate T——, and so the O——s were to endeavour to rescue these prisoners, whilst at the same time outflanking and cutting off the German outposts. The movement had, of course, to be in the nature of an entire surprise, and the hospital to be rushed, if possible, without any firing. According

to Lambert, the wood was about one mile due east of the railway bridge, and there was a tiny path near a mill, on the outskirts of it, that led to the rear of the cottage. To miss this path would be dangerous, as the wood elsewhere was covered with morass and full of quarries.

" Well, Lambert," the Colonel said, " you have led us into a deuced rotten hole, and you must get us out of it somehow. Surely you have some idea of our whereabouts."

Lambert peered again into the darkness and shook his head. " On a night like this," he argued, " it is easy to make mistakes. We must have come much further to the west than I intended."

" Well, then, we had better veer round and make for the extreme east," the Colonel said tartly.

" Would it not be as well to return to Etigny, sir," the Adjutant suggested.

" What, six miles—lose all that time—and with our men already pretty well exhausted ! " the Colonel retorted angrily. " No, that is utterly out of the question. Lambert has brought us here, and, egad, he must take us on to our destination."

Lambert took a few paces into the darkness, and was again peering round, when a young lieutenant approached the Colonel and saluted.

" If you please, sir," he said, " a man has just arrived who says he will act as our guide."

" A man ! A German, I suppose you mean ? What language does he speak ? "

" English. At least in part. He is a Scot. Shall I bring him to you ? "

The Colonel gave a gruff assent, and in a few minutes the subaltern returned, followed by a tall figure enveloped in a long black cloak. With one accord the Colonel, the Adjutant and Lambert all swung round and eyed him curiously.

" Who and what are you ? " demanded the Colonel.

"I'm an inhabitant of these parts," the stranger answered, "and I have come to offer you my services as guide."

"You're in the pay of the Germans, of course," the Colonel retorted sharply. "How did you know we wanted a guide?"

"I overheard your conversation."

"What!" the Colonel cried furiously. "You have been listening to what we were saying. Take him away, Anderson, and have him shot at once."

No one moved. A sort of spell stole over Lambert, the Adjutant, and Anderson, and held them rooted to the ground. The Colonel repeated his order, and was about to lay hands on the stranger himself, when the latter waved him back.

"In an emergency like this, Colonel R——," he said, "you must take what Providence sends you. I am no more a German spy than is your son, Alec, who is, probably, at the present moment returning from an afternoon's march out with the O.T.C. at Cheltenham."

"Great Heavens," the Colonel gasped, "how do you know I have a son Alec, and that he is at Cheltenham. Who are you, sir? A renegade?"

"No, Colonel, I'm not," came the reply. "I'm someone in whom you can place perfect confidence. Trust yourself to me and I will conduct you at once to the cottage in the wood."

"It's very extraordinary. I don't for the life of me know what to make of it," the Colonel muttered, turning to the group of officers by his side. "What do you advise, Lambert?"

"Under the circumstances, sir," Lambert replied slowly, "I should trust him. You can have him shot if he leads us wrong."

"That's true," the Colonel murmured, and turning to the stranger, "Did you hear what Major Lambert said? I can have you shot, if you lead us astray. And, by Jove, I will. Take your position at the head of the

column. If we are successful, I will see that you are adequately rewarded; if you betray us—you die. Do you understand?"

"I do, Colonel," the stranger replied, "and I accept your conditions willingly."

He stepped back, and, at a signal from the Colonel, followed Lieutenant Anderson to the head of the column. A sergeant and a corporal—two old and tried veterans—took up their positions a pace or two behind him, and, at a word from the Colonel, the whole battalion was once more on the move. On and on they went. A dull tramp, tramp, tramp, but in a completely different direction from the one in which they had previously been going. It was all so pitch dark that the corporal and the sergeant had to keep very close to the stranger to see him.

"He marches just like one of us," the Sergeant whispered, "and yet I kenna hear the sound of his feet. What do you make of him?"

"I don't know," the Corporal replied. "I seem to know him, and yet I haven't seen a feature of his face. Something about him reminds me of the night I escaped from N——. It strikes me, Sergeant, that the cottage the Colonel is after is the very one in which we took shelter."

"Then you know the way?"

"Nae," Corporal Findlay replied. "I was too rushed and scared that night to remember much. The only thing I can remember seeing plainly is those two corpses swinging from the beam—Sergeant Mackay's and the gude wife's—and the scene comes back to me vividly now as I look at this guide of ours. Why, I dinna ken."

"Be ready to shoot him, mon, the instant there's treachery," the Sergeant whispered.

"Aye, Aye!" Corporal Findlay replied, tapping the barrel of his rifle knowingly. "He'll nae want a second dose."

On and on they tramped, till presently they forsook

the highway for a field, and then, plunging down and down, eventually found themselves upon level ground facing some trees. "This is the wood," the guide observed, "and here is the path. After we have travelled along it in Indian file, and on tiptoe, for two miles, we shall emerge into a small clearing, where a low mud wall, overtopped by a machine gun, will confront us. The soldiers supposed to be on duty there have been drinking red wine all day, and are now sleeping. If you approach noiselessly you will be able to climb the wall and take them by surprise. The cottage is then yours."

"But there are sentries in the wood."

"One! He will be leaning on his rifle dozing. You must creep up to him and settle him before he has time to make a sound. I will tell you when we approach him."

The guide advanced, and the whole battalion of O——s stalked along behind him.

"I shall be gay glad when this job is over," Corporal Findlay murmured. "I would as soon spend the night in a kirkyard."

However, although every now and then a rustling of leaves that heralded a rabbit made them start, and the ominous screech of an owl caused the hair on the scalp of more than one superstitious Celt to bristle, so far there was no real cause for alarm, and on and on the battalion stole. At last their guide halted, and every man behind him instantly followed suit. He whispered to Corporal Findlay and the Sergeant, and, making way to let them pass, kept close to their heels, guiding them by what appeared to be a minute bull's-eye lantern.

On turning a sharp bend in the path, Corporal Findlay and the Sergeant saw the sentry, as their guide had described him, asleep, and, before he had time to awake, Corporal Findlay had dashed him to the ground with a swinging blow from the butt-end of his rifle. Three minutes later, and the head of the column found itself facing the mud wall and the machine-gun. This was

the critical moment. If their guide meant mischief, now was his opportunity. Following closely at his heels, their rifle and revolver at his head, the Sergeant and Corporal crept up to the wall, and, one by one, the rest of the O——s filed into the open space after them. Holding their breath the Highlanders laid hold of the top of the wall, then with a sudden stoop, they swung themselves upwards. The sleeping sentinels awoke, but only to feel one short, sharp thrust—and the pangs of death. The outer position won, the Highlanders next turned their attention to the cottage and the enclosed space in front of it. There, a strong body of German infantry were stationed, and, as they came rushing out to meet the intruders, they shared the same fate as their companions. In ten minutes there was not a German left alive, and the O——s, their bayonets dripping with blood, were busy liberating the English prisoners. When it was all over, and the Colonel and his staff were sitting down in the front parlour of the cottage enjoying some refreshment, Colonel R—— suddenly remembered the guide. "Anderson," he said, "fetch that fellow—our guide—in here. It's not very gracious behaviour on our part to leave him outside, for, egad, if it had not been for him we should not be where we are. Moreover, I want to see him—I've an idea he's someone I know."

The subaltern departed, and after an interval of some minutes returned, followed only by Corporal Findlay.

"Hulloa!" exclaimed the Colonel, looking up sharply from his meal. "This is not the man I wanted. Where is he?"

"If you please, sir," the subaltern said, in a voice full of suppressed excitement, "Corporal Findlay can tell you all about it—he was the last to see him."

"The last to see him," growled the Colonel. "Why, what the deuce do you mean. Where is he?"

"I can't say, sir," Corporal Findlay began. "After the fight was over I followed him into this cottage,

right into this room. And he halted just where you are sitting, under that beam," and he pointed to the great, white rafter immediately over the Colonel's head. "He then turned round, sir, and drawing aside the cloak, that had hitherto hidden his face, showed himself to me!"

"Good God, man, you needn't look so frightened!" the Colonel cried. "He wasn't the devil, was he?"

"No, sir, he wasn't the devil," Corporal Findlay responded. "He was Sergeant Mackay of the first battalion—and the last time I had set eyes on him was in this room on the night of the retreat from N——, when I and several others of the O——s found him hanging from that rafter—dead."

"And then," said the Colonel, after a long pause, "and then what happened?"

"Why, sir," Corporal Findlay replied, "he smiled, as if something had pleased him mightily, and waving his hand—disappeared."

"And you expect me to believe such a cock and bull story as that," the Colonel said slowly.

"It's the truth, sir," Corporal Findlay said slowly. "Sergeant Scott can corroborate it, for he was with me all the time."

"There's no need to do that," the Colonel answered, "for I know you have spoken the truth. This is by no means my first experience with ghosts—only—for goodness sake do you and Sergeant Scott say nothing about it to the other men. If you do there won't be an ounce of nerves left among them by the morning. Germans are one thing, but ghosts another! It was a splendid revenge for Sergeant Mackay!"

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The stories I have just narrated must be taken for what they are worth. Though I believe they were told me in good faith, I cannot vouch for them.

CHAPTER XVII

A CASE FROM JAPAN

SINCE Japan is a country in which I believe many people are intensely interested, I do not think I need apologise for introducing here the following account of a Japanese haunting.

Never having been to Japan, I cannot lay claim to having had any ghostly adventures there myself; but as this is copied, word for word, from the MSS. of Mr. G. Salis, which was very kindly lent me for the purpose by Mrs. Salis (Mr. Salis's mother), I can most certainly answer for its authenticity.

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"In the spring of 1913, I settled in the village of Akaji, in the southern Island of Japan, in order to work a colliery. The country in this part is mountainous and quite off the track of any tourists, and the inhabitants remain in a very primitive condition. All the people are either farmers, miners, or the keepers of very small shops, and there is not a single hotel nor even an inn. I stayed at first in one of the rooms of a farm house, and, after a little while, was able to lease an old thatched farm house, standing in a small orange orchard, quite close to the colliery.

"Its owner lived in a little house at the back. My house was one-storied, but very high, the pitch of the

thick thatch being very steep. On entering, one found a kitchen with various cooking places, but no chimneys : the smoke curling and losing itself among the huge rafters that supported the roof. The rest of the house was raised, and consisted of four rooms divided from each other by sliding paper-covered screens or fusuma, and with thick padded straw mats or tatami on the floor. I got a table and chair, and put up some book shelves, and made the best room as habitable as possible. This room had a tokonoma, or recess, painted a dark grey ; and a scroll, a crystal and a vase of flowers put in it gave the necessary decoration to the severely bare interior. For the first few months I slept in one of the back rooms, but later, when it got very hot, I only used the one room. I had one servant, and as we got up at dawn, we also went to sleep very early, and usually by nine o'clock the house was in darkness and silence. One night I was awakened, and heard talking and laughing in the next room, only separated from me by a thin screen. Someone was telling a story in an animated voice, and his auditor every now and then ejaculated ' naruhode ' (to be sure) and ' sodesuka ' (is that so), but the voices were kept low and the laughs were subdued. Just then the kitchen clock struck two. I was annoyed at my servant having friends in at that hour, and in the room next mine, and determining to have it out with him in the morning, I fell asleep. Next morning he absolutely denied that anyone had been in the house, and became very indignant when I insisted on what I had heard.

" Two nights later, I again heard a conversation going on, and reluctantly got out of bed and from under the mosquito curtains to investigate. A low chuckling laugh and then a snatch of song—and I pushed back the sliding fusuma. The room was in darkness, but I had a little electric torch which I used in the colliery, and, pressing its button, the room was brightly lit. Inside the mosquito curtain, Tanaka lay soundly sleeping—no

one else was in the room; indeed, but for the futon or mattress covered by the net it was completely bare, and the talking still went on, seeming now to come from the room behind me. I awoke Tanaka, and we went out into the garden. No one was stirring, and the sounds came from inside the house. Away, down the road, three miners were returning from a night shift, and my servant wanted to run and fetch them, but I did not see the object of doing so. The mosquitoes were very bad, and I wanted to get back under the nets, conversations or no conversations, and so we re-entered the house. Silence reigned, and I went back to bed—but not to sleep—for the remainder of that night. Tanaka took the opportunity, while I was at the colliery the next morning, to pack up his few belongings and decamp, leaving a letter saying he could not stay in a house frequented by demons. I got a girl in from the village as a makeshift, and afterwards another servant, but no one would stay in the house after nightfall. I moved my bed into a room at the back, but still used the other room as a living room, and soon became used to the fact that it was haunted. Often, during the day, there were noises coming from near the tokonoma or recess—as though someone was cracking his finger joints, a habit the Japanese have; on several occasions, flowers put in the vase below the hanging scroll were taken out of their vase and arranged lying on a tray. One afternoon I brought my bed into the room, as the autumn was now getting cold, and I had been unwell for some days and wanted the benefit of the afternoon sun. I sent the servant to buy some stamps at the Post Office, a mile away, and stepped into the garden to gather some late dahlias. Looking up I distinctly saw a movement in the room I had left, through the pane of glass let into the paper-covered shoji. Dropping my flowers, I pressed my face against the pane, and saw the bed-clothes, which the servant and myself had arranged, only five minutes previously, had been whisked off and

were lying on the floor. Twice after this, coats hung on a peg near the tokonoma were found almost immediately lying on the floor at some distance, one having been pulled from its peg with such force as partly to tear it.

"On many nights, when I woke up, I heard talking in the next room, and gradually came to distinguish a man's voice, sometimes I thought two men's, and certainly that of a woman and a baby. All the village were now talking of the haunted house, and, now and then, neighbours came in to listen to the mysterious sounds that came, from time to time, from the tokonoma, but they took good care to be gone before sunset.

"Winter had now come, and I fell ill, and as the only really pleasant room in the house was made impossible during the long sleepless nights, I redoubled my endeavour to find another house. A baby's wailings were very distinct, then it was hushed by its mother, and then long conversations ensued between her and one or two men—sometimes there were little taps, as though a tobacco pipe were being emptied of its ashes, but more often a curious noise was heard which sounded like 'putter putter.' About this time, an account appeared in all the Japanese newspapers of a bridge in Tokejo, which was haunted by a woman, and how this spirit had been laid by priestly intervention, and it was suggested that the same might be tried in the present case. I thought it rather a good plan, but, seeing that it was rather expensive, said that the landlord and not his foreign tenant should defray the cost and arrange the matter. But my landlord, who was very unpopular in the village, and with whom I was not on very good terms, would do nothing; and as, just then, another house near the colliery became vacant, I was able to move, and so at last be free of my ghostly visitants. Everyone knew of the reason for my leaving, and the landlord felt sure he would never find another tenant. After the house had been empty for some time, the

landlord himself determined to live in it for some months, in order to demonstrate that things were not so bad after all. He, and his wife, and their two grandchildren accordingly moved their things across from their other house, but did not at first occupy the room with the tokonoma. Seeing, however, that their object in being in the house at all would be defeated unless this room was used, they hung some pictures in the recess, placed a bronze flower vase on a carved stand below them, and also moved in a gilt shrine containing an image of Buddha. A few friends were asked in, but all left at sunset. Next morning I heard that there had been considerable disturbance at the house, and that the younger grandson had been taken with convulsions.

"The same day a move was made again to their former abode, the house was closed, and still remains empty. A temple on a hill near by was being repaired, and, on the completion of the work, a priest came to hold a service. The head man of the village took the opportunity of consulting with him, and together they went to see my late landlord. The facts brought to light, many of which were vaguely known in the district, are as follows :—The house had been built about one hundred and fifty years previously by the head of the family, which was then of more consequence than at present, although it still owned considerable property in pine forests and rice fields. A younger brother of the original builder had conspired against his feudal lord and had committed suicide—hara-kiri. It was not known in which room, but probably it was in the principal one. The next tragedy, that was known of, had happened some fifteen years before, when the son-in-law, the father of the two boys already mentioned, was found hanging from a hook near the wooden ceiling of the room with the tokonoma. He had been away for some time in Tokejo, had spent a great deal of money, and, on his return, had quarrelled violently with his wife. She had run out of the house with her children,

and had stayed on the hillside all night. Next morning her husband was found as above stated. Some months later, again in the same room, on the eve of the birth of her posthumous child, this woman killed herself by drinking poison, made from the leaves of a shrub still growing in the garden. During the convulsions which preceded her death, the child was born, but dead.

"The priest said there was no doubt that the spirits of these various people, related by family ties, and lives, passed among the same surroundings, and who had all come to a dreadful violent end in the same house, and, probably, the same room, were earthbound, and were in the habit of assembling and conversing in the room where their lives had come to an end. Each addition would strengthen and intensify their bondage, and the priest expressed his surprise that the spirits were not actually visible. There was a good deal of discussion as to the terms for a service and ceremony to free the house from these ghostly tenants and to give them rest, I offered a small sum, but as they were, after all, the relations of the landlord, it was upon him that the bulk of the expense fell, and he refused to provide the necessary funds. His argument was that, even were the spirits 'laid,' no one now would rent the house, and so he would not spend any money on it. Whether he also thought that the spirits were as happy holding their ghost-parties round the tokonoma as they would be if they were at rest, he did not say, as such thoughts would be contrary to all Japanese ideas on the subject. Anyway, the house is now closed, the heavy wooden shutters are rolled across the verandahs and bolted, the garden is overgrown and choked with weeds, and the only time when there is human activity about it, is when the orange trees, burdened with fruit, yield their golden harvest.

"G. Salis."

. . . . . .

To revert again to my own experiences. I am often

sorry, extremely sorry, I was ever brought into contact with the Unknown. As I said in one of the early chapters of this book, I did not go out of my way to seek the superphysical—it came to me. And it has never given me any peace. I feel its presence beside me at all times. In the evening, when I am writing, the curtains that are tightly drawn across the closed windows slowly bulge, the candlestick on the mantel-shelf rattles, a picture on the wall swings out suddenly at me, and, when I go to bed and try to sleep, I frequently hear breathings and far-away whispers. Some of these "presences" no doubt have been with me always—most probably they were with my ancestors—whilst others have attached themselves to me in my nocturnal ramblings.

My wife, who was a confirmed disbeliever before our marriage, has long since thrown aside her scepticism, and for a good reason. She has had many startling proofs of the power the spirit has of making itself manifest. The night a near relative of mine died both she and I heard a loud crash on the panel of our bedroom door, and I, though I only, saw a hooded figure standing there. Also, besides having heard the banshee, my wife has seen objects moved by superphysical agency, seen them fanned by a wind that is apparently non-existing, had small stones and other articles thrown at her, and heard all sorts of queer, unaccountable sounds—laughs, sighs, and moans.

Three ghostly incidents have happened to me within the past twelve months. The first was in Red Lion Square. It was twilight; I was alone on the top floor of the house, and no one else was in the building, saving the daughter of the caretaker, who was in the basement. Suddenly footsteps, slow, ponderous footsteps, began to ascend the stairs—which, being uncarpetted and of oak, carried the sound—from the hall. Wondering who it could be, I called out. There was no reply, and the steps drew nearer. On the landing immediately beneath

me they halted. I went out and looked down. No one was to be seen, and the steps immediately began to descend. I followed them right down—a few stairs behind—till they reached the hall, when they abruptly ceased. I learned afterwards that these footsteps were quite a common phenomenon in the house, which had long been haunted by them.

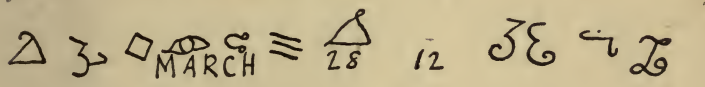
My second experience occurred in the Moscow Road, Bayswater. Feeling a heavy weight on my bed one night and wishing to remove it, I put out my hand. It was immediately seized and held in a warm grip. I sat up in bed, but could see no one. The hand that clasped mine was very soft and small—unmistakably that of a woman. I felt the wrist and forearm, but beyond the elbow there was nothing.

I was rather alarmed at this occurrence at the time, as I have a friend who died shortly after experiencing a similar phenomenon. In my case, however, the lady, whose hand I immediately identified as the hand that had clasped mine, and this lady solemnly declared that upon the same night—we compared dates—she had dreamed of a hand which was the exact counterpart of mine, and that, upon shaking hands with me that afternoon, she had been instantly reminded of her dream.

That there was nothing in common between us, her tastes and outlook on life being absolutely at variance with mine, makes the occurrence, in my opinion, none the less interesting, though somewhat difficult to account for.

My last experience occurred only a few days ago, as I was sitting on the stairs of a haunted house near Ealing. I had applied to the landlord for permission to spend the night there, and, pending his reply, had obtained the keys from the agent, in order to see what the house was like by daylight. Having just finished jotting down some notes—a memorandum of something I had suddenly

thought of—I paused, still holding the pencil in my hand, whilst my note-book lay open on my knee. I had not sat thus for more than a minute, when, with a thrill of surprise, I felt the pencil suddenly taken from my hand, and, looking down, I distinctly saw it, of its own accord, scrawl right across my book. Whether what I afterwards found written in my note-book was written by the spirit that haunted the house, or by a projection of one of my own personalities, I cannot say; neither can I, myself, nor anyone to whom I have shown the symbolic writing, tell what it means. The appended is a facsimile.



I might add that this is my one and only experience of spirit-writing, and also that it was my one and only experience in the haunted house near Ealing, as I did not succeed in getting leave to spend a night there.

Although I must confess I have made little progress so far in my investigations, for my failure to decipher spirit-writing is not the only set-back that I have encountered, I still have hopes. I hope that some day, when I am brought face to face with the Unknown, in a haunted house or elsewhere, I may be able to hit upon some mode of communication with it, and discover something that may be of real service both to myself and to the rest of humanity.

If only I could overcome fear!

It is March 28th, midnight, and as I pen these concluding words, my mind reverts to the symbols and the date—March 28th, twelve o'clock.

Suddenly I hear footsteps—distant footsteps on the road outside—coming in the direction of the house.

I glance at my wife, wondering whether she hears them too. She is asleep, however, and, as I covertly watch her, I see a look of terror gradually steal into her

face. Clicking steps. They come nearer and nearer. They stop for a moment at our door, and then—thank God—pass slowly on.

I look out of the window—the road is absolutely deserted, but from close at hand the sounds are wafted to me—ciick, click, click, fainter, fainter, fainter—until they abruptly cease.

THE END.

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